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ISSUE
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PLAYBOY

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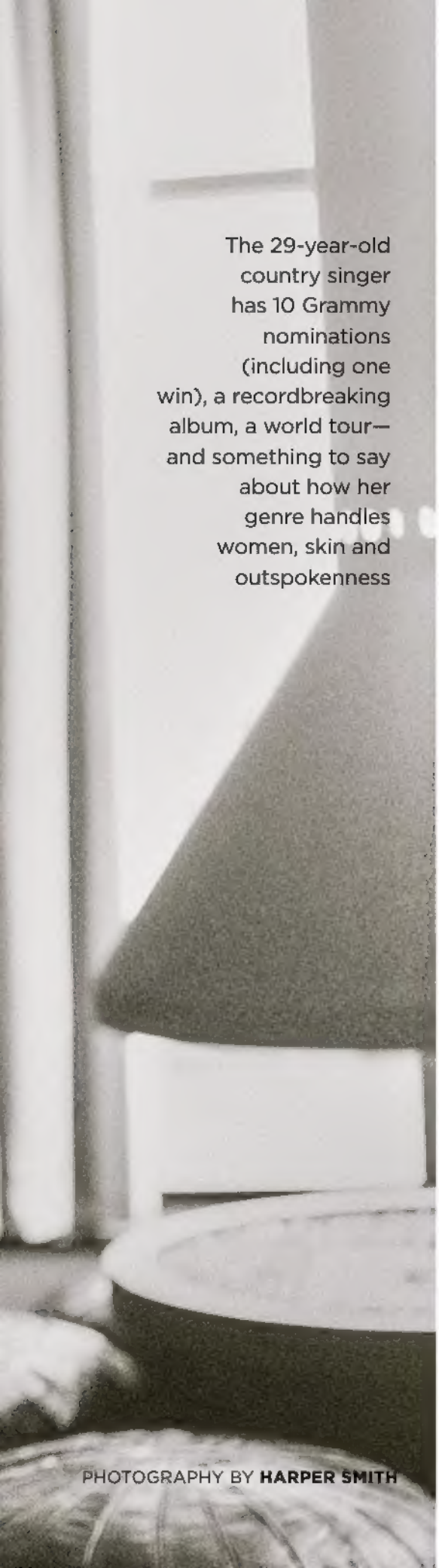
MAREN MORRIS



The 29-year-old country singer has 10 Grammy nominations (including one win), a recordbreaking album, a world tour—and something to say about how her genre handles women, skin and outspokenness

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **HARPER SMITH**

BY **ANDREA DOMANICK**

Q1: *Your 2016 debut, Hero, won you a Grammy, and this year's follow-up, Girl, was streamed 24 million times in its first week—the most for any studio country album by a woman. What does the spirit of this transition, from Hero to Girl, mean to you?*

MORRIS: I wrote the bulk of Hero around four years ago at a time when virtually no women were being played on country radio. And from the few who were, I felt I wasn't hearing my perspective. I wanted to hear less from a girl singing to a guy about how cute he is and how she wants him to notice her, and more from the perspective of 20-somethings who are out of college but aren't quite ready to settle down. Those fun few years when you're just a mess, you've got a few flings but are starting to come into your womanhood and adulthood. You're not making as many of the same mistakes as you did in your early 20s, but you're still not ready to call it a day. I wanted to be the sassy voice of reason. I was also going through a tough breakup after five years in my first real relationship. At the same time, my career was starting to take off. So Hero was part breakup record, part me finding my independence.

Over the next few years, I started to become more of a boss and a sort of CEO for myself, putting my band and crew on salary, giving them health insurance, becoming the head of this machine.

I also fell in love. I started to open up more to my fans. I wanted people to know I'm still that girl, but I'm growing up and I'm okay with being vulnerable. It's not a weakness. When you find an equal in your life, it's not you giving up anything or any part of you; it's sharing your whole self with another whole self. It took me a second to realize that's a good thing.

Q2: *Girl meditates on everything from craving sex and being in love to moments of yearning and the more emotional nuances of being a woman. How do you approach writing about these topics in a time when feminism and womanhood tend to be associated with a take-noprisoners kind of strength?*

MORRIS: By being honest with myself and knowing I don't have the sassy, armored exterior many of my fans probably think I have. I've learned it's okay to not be a badass all the time. Over the past few years, as I wrote Girl, I learned that it's not a weakness to be vulnerable with somebody else, to share all your light and your darkness with them, to trust that they won't trample your heart or judge you. That was such a learning curve for me, because I used to think if

Locking into becoming an established country artist has been daunting.

you were vulnerable and admitted how much you needed someone, you were being submissive. That's so far from the case. Saying I need my husband [country singer- songwriter Ryan Hurd] isn't me submitting to his power. It's me being independent and saying, "Yeah, I need your fucking time right now."

It's healthy to tell someone that. It's not co-dependent; it's a gift. It takes strength. It takes balls. My acceptance of that felt like, Wow, this is some woman shit. There's strength in the femininity of needing someone but also in having the confidence to ask for it.

Q3: *The album's title track has become an anthem among your fans. Can you explain its meaning?*

MORRIS: It's about a fight I was having with another woman who's also in the music industry. Women in this industry are often pitted against each other. It's not our fault, but we internalize it, because that's what women do. We take on the weight, because we're always so quick to apologize and make peace when we should be like, "Actually, this is their issue, not ours. We need to figure this out. It's not our fault there are so few slots that we turn on each other."

Q4: *Yet you've also said, "Being a woman isn't the most interesting thing about me."*

MORRIS: "What's it like to be a woman in the music industry today?" is the question I'm most sick of being asked. My husband is an artist as well, and no one ever asks him what it's like to be a man in the industry today. What would he say? "Same as it ever was." I never know how to re-answer that question. I don't know how to answer it in the first place, actually, because I don't want to be remembered for being a great female artist. I would like to be known as a great artist.

Q5: *Last year you were featured on Zedd's "The Middle," one of the biggest songs of 2018, which landed three Grammy nominations. What do you wish people knew about you now that you have a higher profile?*

MORRIS: I would love for people to do their research and know that I'm not just an artist. I started as a writer and wrote for other artists, and I co-produced my last two albums. I don't get a ton of questions about my work in that realm. It's always, "So you changed your hair and, like, how crazy is that?" It's like, Motherfucker, I produced my album, thanks.

Q6: *Okay, we'll take the bait. How has your background as a songwriter shaped you as an artist?*

MORRIS: I learned so much in my years

behind the scenes. I had to help produce my own demo sessions, and I definitely learned how to listen to and follow trends on the radio as a writer, for research. That has helped me pick singles; I know what hits my ear. Sometimes I'm right, sometimes I'm wrong — but most of the time I've been right. It comes from studying in the "university" of Nashville songwriting and learning from people who were better than me.

Not thinking you can produce is a mentality even incredible writers are forced into. It's not an easy line of work, but when you love every facet of making music, you really do care how a guitar sounds. You care about the reverb on your vocal or how loud the bass is — details like that. I love sinking my teeth into it. That's why it takes me so long to make music, because I overthink it sometimes.

Q7: *Are you a perfectionist?*

MORRIS: I'm a perfectionist until I'm not. I know when I get a gut feeling about something and it's done. Some people will just keep working on music, remixing it and changing things little by little until it's two years later. And then you never put it out. Luckily I have a bone in my body that tells me, "Okay, you can't do anything else to this."

Q8: *Various headlines have described you as being restricted by country. Are media outlets getting the narrative right?*

MORRIS: In a sense, no, because I actually am played on the radio. For the past two years I've been the most-played woman on country radio. It's still way less than a man, but for some reason my music is being played. It's not just about having a catchy song; it's because I don't sound like anyone else. At the beginning, that was hard, but all my singles have been risks. Even doing "The Middle" was a risk, because I was risking that country radio would think I was abandoning them because I was part of this giant pop song.

That I'm restrained in any way is a dumb perception, because I've tried to kick ass at everything I do. I work hard. I wish the same for my sisters, because they work just as hard, if not harder, than I do, and they don't get a single spin on the radio. I don't think I'm pissing on my success by speaking up for them. I'm just trying to say, while I have the success and while I'm here, why aren't any of my friends getting played? I want to shine a light while I have it and not let it be just about me.

Q9: *The past few years have seen greater crossover between country and pop. Is this helping country music? What do you think when people suggest that country music needs saving?*

MORRIS. There will always be traditionalists in every genre who try to hold on to the old. I have respect for that, because there's so much about country music — classic country music—that I love. But every generation has been accused of ruining country music, even the outlaw era of Waylon and Willie. Country is evolving. It's always evolving. You'll always have purists no matter what.

Q10: *So cross-pollination between genres is a good thing?*

MORRIS: Country artists having songs on the pop charts and on pop radio this past year has only helped our genre. Most young people who stream music don't listen to it because of its genre; they listen to it because it's popular, or they discovered it on a playlist and it makes them feel something. When I did "The Middle" with Zedd, most of the world had never heard of me. A lot of people have checked out my country music as a result. It has brought a lot of awareness, fans and listeners to country music, especially recently. It's good for our genre to cross-pollinate, because it makes for better music. It's keeping everyone on their toes and not regurgitating the same kind of art on the conveyor belt.

Q11: *You performed at this year's Grammys with Miley Cyrus and Dolly Parton, and you recently invited pop star JoJo to perform with you onstage in Los Angeles during your world tour. What other artists do you want to sing with?*

MORRIS: I would love to sing with Kehlani. I saw H.E.R. at the Grammys, and she was incredible. I love Khalid. If I'm shooting real high, I would love to sing with Beyoncé. That's the pinnacle.

Q12: *Bigger success has opened you up to more criticism. You've been slut-shamed and body-shamed online quite a bit. Why are you still dealing with this in country-music culture?*

MORRIS: It's a transitional time. Everyone's super anxious. A lot of it is the political climate, the culture of social media. Anytime someone is courageous or doesn't try to blend in, it pisses people off. It's been like this forever, but we're much more connected now than we used to be. A lot of hot-button things that seem small explode into something huge.

Q13: *Have you ever regretted something you've said publicly?*
MORRIS: Not really. Every time I've spoken up or clapped back at some troll, it has been very much me. I wouldn't go back on any of it, because they deserved it. Body shamers? They're asking for it. I would never regret calling them out.

At one point I posted a picture of Emma Gonzalez, one of the survivors of the Parkland shooting, and I lost probably 5,000 followers. To not be able to share an opinion, or to lose fans and ticket sales over it, is so mind- boggling to me, because it's an American right — a human right — to be able to voice your opinion. Of course, any fan has the choice to quit buying your music or listening to it. But as a tax-paying citizen, I should be allowed to speak up when I'm passionate about something. It's always to increase awareness. It's to let my fans know where I stand. I don't want to be one of those head-in-the-sand artists who's only worried about keeping the money in my pocket. I get only one life here, and if I'm going to be a musician and do this thing I've been given a gift for, I would like people to know what I believe in. This is where I stand, this is what I want, this is the world I want my kids to live in. That's why I speak up when I do. It definitely ruffles feathers. Not many country artists speak up.

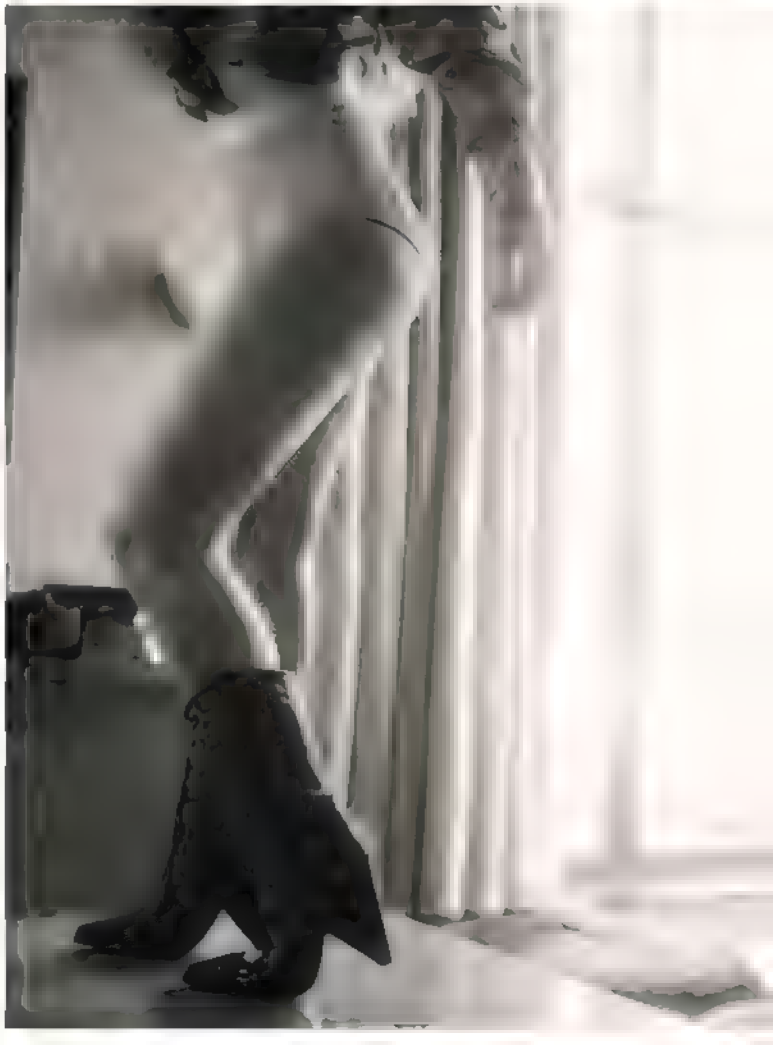
Q14: *Not many country artists have agreed to be photographed by PLAYBOY either.*
MORRIS: I remember Dolly Parton's amazing [October 1978] PLAYBOY cover and reading about the drama surrounding this wholesome figure being part of a magazine that has showcased naked women for decades. It was such a faux pas in country music, and yet she ended up making one of the most iconic PLAYBOY covers of all time. Not many other country artists have done that.

I was intrigued, because so many of the moves Dolly made in her career were about bucking the status quo, especially when it came to sexuality and gender norms within country music. As a woman in country music — as a woman in any genre — it always fascinated me. So when I heard this magazine wanted to interview and photograph me, I thought, Okay, I've seen a lot of wonderful spreads you guys have done with artists I love, such as Halsey, so what the hell?

Q15: *Are you concerned about how people might react to your being in this magazine?*
MORRIS: I'm speaking such a loud, noisy concept of what it means to be a woman in the music industry right now. This feels like I'm amplifying a message I've been passionate about since the beginning that has intensified in the past year. I feel I've already challenged a lot of sexual norms. It's funny, because it's not that risqué in the grand scheme of things. Even the cover of Girl is slightly risqué, but it feels like me — throwback but a little modern. I knew it would piss some people off that I was in a bra top. Doing PLAYBOY has been a really fun challenge. I'm trying to do more things that scare me. Every year I'm trying to peel back my layers emotionally — and I guess physically.

Q16: *What else scares you?*
MORRIS: Looking into becoming an established country artist with each passing year has been daunting. It's where I'm comfortable; it's what I grew up in. But I'm sick of the standards we've been forced into, and it scares me that I'm getting so fed up with certain norms.

Q17: *How so?*
MORRIS: I could just shut up and sing, keep my head down, not talk about politics or sexuality in my songs. But I swear quite a bit. I talk openly about drinking. I'm learning things about myself that are starting to freak me out, in a good way. I'm growing



up, and that doesn't necessarily mean becoming more mature or wiser or buttoning things up a bit more. Sometimes it's letting it all be a little more freewheeling.

Q18: *You've been married for just over a year. What has marriage taught you?*

MORRIS: It's taught me that I'm not always right. I've been doing this music thing for so long that it's how I'm conditioned. Letting someone else in and letting him be a part of that with me has been a bigger struggle than I imagined. It's so easy to fall in love, but to stay in love and to fall deeper into love? That's work. It's not giving up your stance but allowing yourself to listen. You both could be right, just because you disagree with somebody doesn't mean they're wrong.

Being married for the past year has also helped me figure out more who I am independently. For example, my husband is very much a feminist, and I've never really done anything that's freaked him out. He has always been accepting. Even with PLAYBOY, he was like, "That's really hot." It's awesome to be with somebody who is an equal and isn't trying to make you feel like a skank because you're proud of your body — someone who's not watering down your ideologies for patriarchal and bullshit standards that women in country music have been locked into for the past several decades.

Q19: *What makes you feel sexy?*

MORRIS: I've been trying to be better at exercising the past year or two. I don't want to be skinny. I want to be strong and feel like Lara Croft. I remember when choosing Girl's cover, I was like, Yeah, I have this body; I'm going to put it on the cover! I felt really sexy because I knew I was going to get flak for it, from these little titties, but I'm definitely owning it. I like when I scare the absolute shit out of myself like that. That's when I feel sexy. That's what gets me off.

Q20: *What should our readers know about sex or sexuality that maybe they haven't thought about?*

MORRIS: Lingerie is supremely overrated and unnecessary. Also, I would say that if you're in a relationship and that person isn't going down on you on the regular, dump them. If it doesn't happen enough early on, you know what you're getting for the rest of it. A selfish lover is a no-go from the get-go. Just dump him, dump her, dump whoever it is. If you can't sometimes give and sometimes take or have a completely equal experience, then that person is probably selfish in many other facets of his or her life as well. ■

STEALING HEARTS
Sofia Esposito

We're happy to have you featured. Can you give us a bit of background on your career as a model and where it all started? I've been modeling for a year now and have always been mindful of my appearance. With my commitment to fitness and my distinctive look, I'm eager to see where this journey will take me.

How do you usually begin your day? I usually start my day by hydrating with my water jug, I keep at my bedside followed by enjoying a cup of coffee while checking my emails and listening to self-help videos and audiobooks as I get ready, followed by the gym on some days where I train in the am, gets me off to a good start to my day.

If you could spend a day doing anything, what would it be and why? I'd kick things off by chilling at the beach and soaking up some sun. After that, I'd treat myself to a spa day, try out some new cuisines, and sample interesting foods. A little retail therapy would definitely be on the agenda, too, followed by as many naps as I can fit in. Why? Because relaxation helps me find my peace and recharges me for whatever's next! When I'm not working or traveling, my favorite ways to unwind include hitting the sauna, doing a cold plunge, and stretching. I love watching mindless movies or getting lost in a good documentary. Cooking a nice meal while watching TV is also a favorite of mine. Sometimes, I enjoy listening to self-help videos or audiobooks, too.

Do you have any hidden talent, if so what is it? I have a couple of hidden talents! I can do pistol squats, both with and without heels, one leg at a time, and I keep my form really solid. Plus, I can pop almost every inch of my body.

What is the best place you have ever been to in the world? The best place I've ever been is Europe. It's so beautiful, with rich culture and amazing cuisine.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? Some of my biggest dreams include retiring comfortably with solid investments, starting a business that I can still manage even after I retire, and having as few regrets as possible as I grow older.

Things that you can't go a day without? I can't go a day without coffee. It gives me life, and even the smell of it makes me happy. Lip balm is a must, obviously, and my phone is essential since it's how I work, communicate, and use it for anything and everything.

Looking back, what advice would you give to younger yourself? Looking back, I'd tell my younger self to prioritize family, learn about financial freedom, and focus your energy on people who invest in you and contribute to your growth.

That said, what advice would you give to all the women out there when it comes to love and relationships? When it comes to love and relationships, my advice to women is to steer clear of telling men what to do they'll do what they want anyway. Focus on observing their actions and adjust your own approach accordingly. Remember, how you behave reflects how much you value the relationship.

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner and what do you value the most? I find a few qualities particularly attractive in a partner: confidence, intelligence, natural leadership, and a balance of success with humility. I also appreciate someone who takes care of their health and appearance. Most importantly, I value security and communication.

MY SEX EDUCATION

Shame, misinformation, indomitable hormones — **Sasheer Zamata** and **Joel Kim Booster** take us back to school

THE ONLY THING MORE TERRIFYING THAN SEX-ED SCARE TACTICS IS THE WAY I TREATED MY MECHANICAL CHILD

BY **SASHEER ZAMATA**

I was walking down the street not too long ago, and I overheard a full adult woman say, "I didn't know you could get pregnant on your first try!" That's when I realized the world desperately needs better sex education.

I'm including myself in that statement. I had a mortifying moment in college when one of my friends explained how the guy she was sleeping with only wanted to do "doggy style." I responded, "That's crazy. He only wants to do anal?" There was silence, and one of my friends slowly asked, "So…do you think when dogs have sex they're always doing it anally?" And I guess when you say it out loud, it sounds dumb. Of course they're not always doing it anally — most of them save that for birthdays and bribes. But I wasn't thinking of the logistics of canine coitus, I honestly wasn't thinking of sex at all, because I was taught not to.

I was raised in Indiana, and my sex education was pretty much "don't." I remember a slide show of STIs in my middle school health class featuring images of cauliflower sprouting out of someone's ass, or blood and pus oozing from someone's eyeball, and those were used as evidence for why we should abstain. I went to a public school, so they weren't telling us to save ourselves for religious reasons — they just weren't telling us anything.

Our class participated in the Baby Think It Over program, in which students take care of a robot baby to learn how hard it is to care for a human baby. I guess we were supposed to "think over" whether or not it's worth it to have kids while still in school. I had killed multiple Tamagotchis by this point, so I wasn't feeling good about my chances of being a good robot mom, but I wanted to at least pass the assignment.

The baby had a computer in it to record how often I fed, held, changed and nurtured it (which is kind of what I currently do in my relationship). It would also cry, and I just had to guess why (which is what my partner does in our relationship). It was so annoying. Sometimes I just let the baby wail because I was busy with other homework. There was one day when I ran to the bus while holding my bundle of joy, and her head was flopping back and forth, so that probably wasn't good. At the end of the experiment, the teacher pulled together all the counts of neglect and abuse to give me a grade. Apparently I had a lot of counts of neglect and abuse. Someone from Child Protective Services

I'm hoping an intern and not someone who could be helping real children — came to my school to talk to all the bad student-parents. They took me into a room and warned me that if this were a real baby, they would take her from me. And my response was, "Good! I didn't ask for this baby!" They didn't care about my protest.

I wish I had said, "You know what would've been more useful? Telling me how not to have a baby instead of showing me how hard life is with one. Embarrassing me in class by making me roll a condom over a banana so I'm not too embarrassed to do it with an actual penis in front of me. Giving me language I can use to ask my partners about their sexual history and health so I'm not speechless in the moment. Teaching me that sex can be an enjoyable experience between consenting parties and doesn't have to be a shameful, detrimental act."

It can be easy not to have a baby if you don't want one — you just need access to resources and information, which is getting tougher these days. Let's keep spreading knowledge so people can have more control of their lives and know how to get rid of the cauliflower in their butt. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RICK RODNEY**

FOR AMERICAN KIDS LIKE ME, SEX ED HAS ALWAYS BEEN EQUAL PARTS CLASSROOM AND SCHOOLYARD (WITH A HEALTHY DASH OF BASEMENT REC ROOM)

BY **JOEL KIM BOOSTER**

No one had to teach me how to come. Every afternoon, I'd lie on the cold linoleum of my family's bathroom, turn on the shower for sonic camouflage and get to work on myself. Like a prodigy with no formal training, I was a natural. Maybe I couldn't read sheet music, and the finger placement was definitely off, but lying there, clutching my instrument, I learned what my body was capable of.

My parents, blue- collar conservative Christians, homeschooled me for most of my adolescence in an attempt to protect me from the secular world and its corrupting notions of liberalism and science. For their own edification they purchased a book on talking to your son about sex, which I would secretly take from their shelves and study solemnly in my bed at night. There I discovered that my white pee was actually called "semen" and, in the final and shortest chapter, titled simply "Homosexuality," that the urges I'd been visualizing while making the white pee (fueled by old Archie comic books) were unnatural and wrong. Turned out all those tiny, messy miracles weren't miracles at all.

If instinct was my teacher, then shame became my tutor. In the years that followed, I'd spend approximately 15 minutes of each day on that bathroom floor and the rest of my waking hours working out how and when I'd be going to hell for it.

Soon I graduated from the bathroom to a corner of our basement, where my parents had foolishly placed our brand-new computer. The creaky stairwell served as a de facto lookout while I entered such imaginative terms into the pre-Google search bar as gay and *gay sex*. In the waning days of dial-up it wasn't unusual for me to wait a full 20 minutes as our Dell PC loaded, line by line, a horrifically photoshopped image of George Clooney receiving a blow job from Brad Pitt. I learned about anal sex from erotic gay fan fiction, which always made it seem so simple and spontaneous. Obi-Wan never once shat on Qui-Gon's dick. Maybe it was the Force.

When I turned 16, my parents reluctantly sent me off to public school. My entry into the real world would coincide with our school district's mandatory sex-ed class, years too late to be anything but an exercise in not making eye contact with the teacher. By this point all of us had enrolled in a rigorous course of our own design, consisting of facts and fictions cobbled together from internet porn and various misremembered half-truths some older brother brought home from college. It was like a game of telephone played by hundreds of teenage boys with wild ideas about the viability of their sperm in a hot tub.

After little more than a month at public school, I tearfully came out to a friend during lunch period. A short lifetime of shame and mortal fear — I set it all aside in that moment because the smell of Axe body spray got me hard. Sadly, it still does. The sex-ed class came to an end, but my education did not. (That same year I met my first boyfriend, who was also the first man I heard whisper "teeth" with erotic caution as I gave head for the first time, a VHS tape of his eighth-grade production of *The Music Man* playing in the background.) Every new experience, even the many, *many* humiliating ones, felt like a revelation.

"That was sex!" I would say to myself. I eventually realized that it wasn't, but I would go on to learn things they forgot to teach us, about consent, about the different ways we experience desire, about the ways our bodies betray us. But I still go back to those teenage moments — fucking in the backseat of a Pontiac Sunfire parked inconspicuously in an empty Target lot — when it all felt miraculous again. ■

BY SUZANNAH WEISS

the future of sex toys is gender neutral

BUTT PLUGS ARE NO LONGER ONLY FOR GAY MEN, AND VIBRATORS AREN'T JUST FOR WOMEN

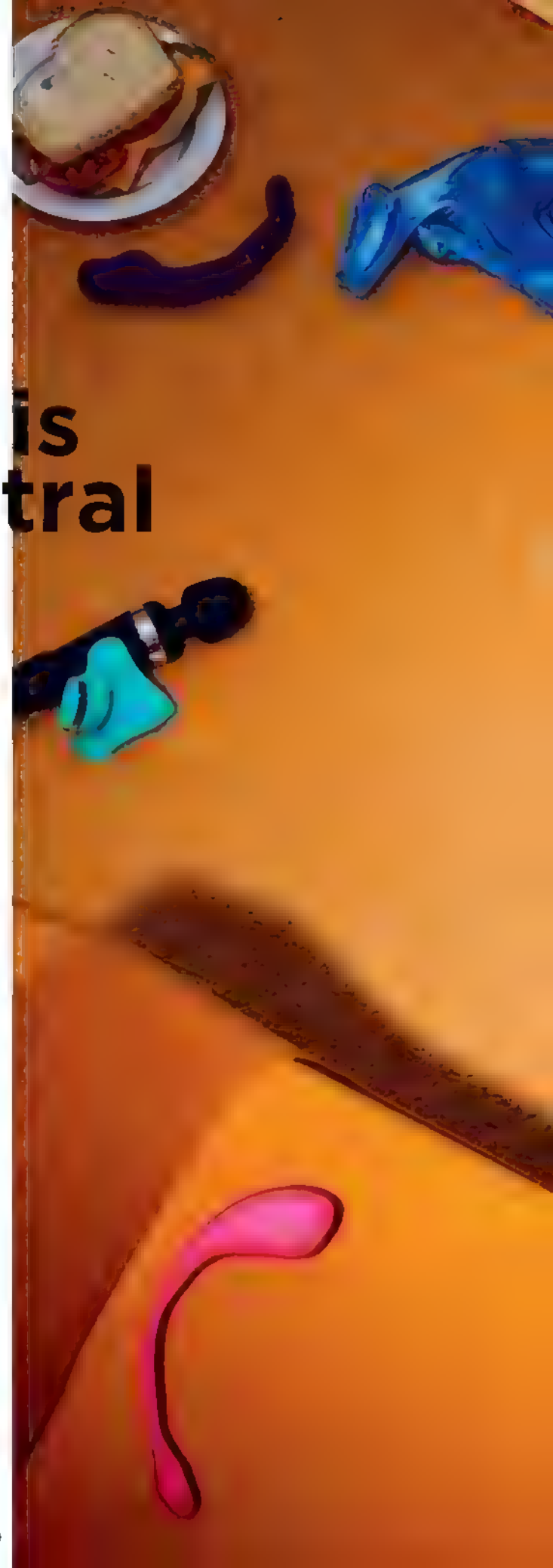
As a kid, I was expected to play with "girls' toys" like dolls and horses, but I also enjoyed "boys' toys" like race cars and action figures. As an adult, when sex toys became my plaything of choice, I found there wasn't much wiggle room: The ones designed for my body were pink or purple, often with photos of women in sexy underwear on the package.

In recent years major retailers have begun to offer gender-neutral products or to market existing ones as gender neutral. Target has removed gender-based signs from its kids' sections, Amazon no longer uses gender filters in its toy listings, and the Disney Store has stopped labeling children's costumes as either "boys" or "girls." But one product category has remained stubbornly gendered: sex toys. Many adult companies are surprisingly regressive in assuming that certain toys are made for certain bodies and certain bodies map onto certain identities. Slowly, though, that's also changing — and, in the process, changing how we think about sex, gender and pleasure.

Carol Queen, resident sexologist for the feminist sex shop Good Vibrations, says her customers have long been vocal about their desire for less-gendered toys. Some of those customers are among the increasingly visible population of trans and non-binary people. A recent study from the Williams Institute at UCLA found that the estimated percentage of adults in the United States who identify as transgender has doubled in roughly the past decade. These people may feel excluded by toys that come in pink pouches emblazoned with photos of women just because they're designed for vulvas.

"Labeling toys by gender puts the power in the sellers' hands to make assumptions about buyers based on their gender," says Ambrose Heffner, a trans man. "Labeling toys by function puts the power in buyers' hands to make a judgment call and make their own empowered decisions regarding their body and sexuality."

Restrictive labeling affects cisgender customers as well. "Our



ARE
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Above: A vibrator for females and a masturbator for males, this sex toy is ideal for couples' play but can also be used solo. Ranne S Duo Vibe. Left: This small but mighty spherical toy packs a powerful punch, and all that's required for enjoyment is nerve endings. Unbound Babes Bean.

Right: Designed for long-distance couples, the Lush 2 allows users to control the vibration intensity via cell phone. Lovense Lush 2.

cis-women customers have long disliked the 'porno lady' boxes because they were being sold an image of what a woman should look like along with their vibrator," Queen explains. Genderneutral toys appeal to people who want to experiment with new sensations but feel intimidated by — or are simply unaware of — products marketed to a different demographic. "There are many men out there who could benefit from using toys marketed to women but haven't because the toys are bright pink or designed to look like a realistic penis," says Daniel Saynt, founder of the sexual-wellness digital agency NSFW Creative.

To meet these customers' demands, brands are tailoring their colors, designs and packaging to a broader range of buyers. Over the past few years, Lovense has released at least two toys, the wand vibrator Domi and the vibrating butt plug Hush, exclusively in black — a stark contrast to its couples' set from 2013: a pink vibrator named Nora and a white masturbation sleeve named Max. Anal-toy seller b-Vibe offers most of its products in black, and sexual-wellness brand Maude offers a plain gray personal massager simply called "vibe." Dame Products, which launched the couples' vibrator Eva to close the pleasure gap between men and women, now markets its products as sex aids for all people with vulvas.

Some companies have even designed new products to work on a variety of bodies. MysteryVibe's Crescendo vibrator folds and twists into different shapes so users can stimulate multiple body parts. Customers appreciate the Crescendo — which, according to MysteryVibe, doubled the company's sales between 2016 and 2018 — because they can use it not just on themselves but also on their partners, regardless of how they identify. "The fact that you can have one multipurpose, fully adaptable product helps shift your focus off the need for the 'correct' toy for a specific region and allows the user to be more creative in the application of it and thus more creative and engaged in sex in general," says chief marketing officer Dominnique Karetsos.

Lelo's Transformer, which morphs into a rabbit vibrator, cock ring, prostate massager and more, raked in more than $1million in its first year, according to the company's brand expert, Stu Nugent. Users like that it isn't in your face about being gender neutral, he explains. "Most nonbinary customers don't want to be reminded of gender all the time."

It's not just sex-toy inventors hopping on the gender neutral bandwagon; some online marketplaces, including Wild Flower, Spectrum Boutique and Vibrant, avoid grouping products by gender or mentioning gender in their descriptions. "Wild Flower has grown by five times its size over the last year alone, and based on customer feedback, a lot of that growth is in part because of how accessible toys become once gender is removed," says Amy Boyajian, Wild Flower co-founder and chief executive officer. "Customers are getting the products they desire easily while also being introduced to new options." (Boyajian also notes that gender- neutral sex toys push back against the "pink tax" — the higher prices typically placed on female-gendered products.)

Many retailers similarly avoid labels such as "sex toys for women" and "sex toys for men" in their signage and conversations with customers, says Lynn Comella, author of *Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed the Business of Pleasure*. "Some of the most interesting conversations I had with sex-toy retailers and buyers were about 'queering' sex toys and breaking open boxes that didn't need to be there," she says.

Although the "gender neutral" label often attracts a wider customer base, many — one could argue all — toys originally made for one gender are already gender neutral. Lelo, for example, says it initially marketed its Mona as a G-spot massager but saw an uptick in sales after promoting it as a prostate massager. "While it's possible to make a versatile sex toy and phrase everything

Above: For the adventurous, this double-ended vibrator can easily morph into a cock ring, a rabbit vibe, a clitoral massager and just about anything else, with a few simple twists. It can be as flexible and versatile as the sexual identity of its users. Lelo Transformer

Below: This weighted anal toy provides the sensation of penetration, while the slick silicone exterior makes for comfortable entry. Bvibe Snug Plug 3

vaguely to avoid making assumptions or dictating how a product should be used, you also occasionally have to say very directly, 'Hey, try putting this thing directly up your butt,'" says Nugent.

While such marketing may seem progressive, sex toys are actually returning to their roots. As far back as the late 1800s, vibrator ads featured both men and women, according to Hallie Lieberman, author of *Buzz: A Stimulating History of the Sex Toy*. "It wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s, with some in the feminist movement like Betty Dodson turning vibrators into symbols of female empowerment, that they got gendered more female," she says.

The evolution goes on. The first gender-neutral toys had generic bases with male and female attachments, but as more people identify outside the gender binary, brands are accommodating a broader range of identities. "You can sell a genderneutral toy to a much larger market than you can a gendered toy, so there's more opportunity to make money," Lieberman says.

Perhaps one day it will become common knowledge that sex aids of all varieties, just like clothes or children's toys, can be enjoyed by anyone, regardless of their anatomy or identity. Personally, the chance to use gender-neutral sex toys has helped me feel freer to forge my own identity, just as the ability to play with dinosaurs did when I was a kid. ■

ON
THIN
ICE

A social-media-fueled tourism boom saved Iceland from economic ruin. A decade later, is it leading the country to environmental collapse?

BY **CIARA O'ROURKE**

Selfie sticks punch the sky as three women bob through the milky-blue water. They look like knights charging against a strong wind, but they're young and they're American and they persevere. Their hair is piled high on their heads, and they purse their lips as they gaze up at their iPhones. Behind them, a man takes photo after photo of his partner as she swans in small circles. She reviews the shots with a severe expression as he shields the screen from the sun.

When their images post to Instagram, they will all appear to be alone in this otherworldly watering hole, the Blue Lagoon, situated about 45 minutes outside Reykjavik, Iceland's capital. In real life, they're surrounded by tourists from countries such as Pakistan, Algeria and Poland, all similarly posing in the steamy, geothermal seawater or making their way to the bar, where the first glass of sparkling wine is on the house.

The Blue Lagoon warns its patrons that it's important to stay hydrated while wading in the 100-degree, silica-heavy pool. Flowing on one side of the lagoon is a metal fountain etched with the words PURE ICELANDIC WATER to signal where visitors can fill their cups for free. If this seems like a marketing ploy to make local water sexy, it's working. One woman's eyes go wide as she tells me how great the tap water tastes in Iceland, better than back home. The country's tourism board playfully rebranded tap water as *Kranavatn*, a word that literally translates to "tap water."

Good marketing is behind Iceland's tourism boom. The country's seemingly pristine landscapes abound on social-media screens and draw more than 2 million visitors to its shores each year to hike behind thundering waterfalls or to see up close the canyon where Justin Bieber shot his "I'll Show You" music video. Some land at Keflavik International Airport — the main entry point for foreign travelers — because they're seeking something more ancient than the Colosseum in Rome, less defiled than Tulum. Others are here because they've seen Iceland's remote vistas on Facebook or on *Game of Thrones*, which often filmed here. But as the number of tourists has spiked, with yearly visitors outnumbering permanent residents sixfold, traditional systems have broken down. Locals know not to venture onto a glacier in sandals and to stay on designated paths when hiking. Visitors, in their attempts to get photos that don't feature other gawking tourists, traipse farther and farther off the trail, destroying plant life. Tourists pluck the words SEND NUDES in moss that will take decades to regrow.

The culprits in that very real crime against a hillside are unknown, but you can picture them. News reports have warned about a crisis in the country, one that's overwhelming everything from hotels to national parks. Iceland's environment is fragile, and it's being threatened by too many travelers. But tourism helped yank the country out of an earlier crisis, buoying the economy after the debilitating collapse of 2008. And here I am, ready to experience a country whose rapidly expanding popularity may be permanently damaging what lured me here in the first place.

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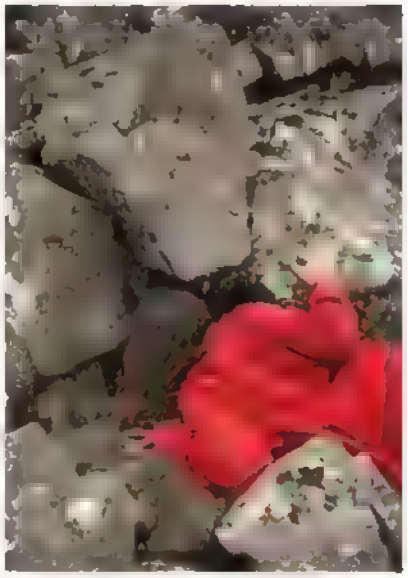
I'm seated next to a man named Jason on my flight from Paris to Reykjavik in late June, and I tell him my plans for the next five days. Drive to a town near the Sólheimajökull glacier, which I'll climb with a tour group recommended on Trip Advisor, then drive to Reykjavik and visit the Blue Lagoon and the Golden Circle, a popular tourist route.



Normally I avoid talking to anyone on planes, but I notice Jason's driver's license is from Washington state, which leads us to discover that we graduated from the same college in the same year. The coincidence does not feel so impressive when I recount the number of people I know who've visited Iceland in the past few years — nearly two dozen. One of my favorite stories: A woman was in a coffee shop in Reykjavik when she asked the person sitting next to her to scoot over. In a country with only about 350,000 residents, perhaps it's also not so remarkable that the woman was Björk.

Tourism has played a vital role in helping Iceland recover from the 2008 economic crash, says Sigríður Dögg Guðmundsdóttir, a spokesperson for Visit Iceland and

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHANTAL ANDERSON**

ents feel Iceland
a cartoon of itself.

Left: Situated on the south coast, Reynisfara is one of Iceland's most visited black-sand beaches. Acclaimed for its beauty, the beach is also notoriously dangerous due to the water's strong undertow.

a sort of hype-woman for the country. The industry has grown rapidly, from fewer than 500,000 visitors in 2010 to 2.2 million in 2018. The country used to be a landing pad for planes to refuel before heading on to Europe or North America. But Icelandair and, before it collapsed in March, WOW Air, offered stopover deals that helped secure Iceland as a travel destination.

In some ways that growth has been a boon, Guðmundsdóttir says. Restaurants and other services have opened in rural areas, where residents now have entrepreneurial opportunities that didn't exist before the tourism explosion.

"People are able to move back into the towns and villages they grew up in because they can create jobs for themselves," she says. Höfn, a town of barely 2,000 where Guðmundsdóttir used to live, now supports a large grocery store and three restaurants — amenities that locals alone couldn't sustain.

But the influx of tourists has also strained infrastructure, she says, especially at the most-trafficked sites, including the Golden Circle. The canyon from Bieber's music video, which has almost half a billion views on YouTube, closed temporarily after Beliebers from across the globe overran it, destroying delicate vegetation. Another hiking spot, Reykjadalur, also went dark after Iceland's environmental agency decided it had been endangered by tourists. A 2018 report from the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Innovation says beloved vistas including the Dverghamrar basalt columns and the Gullfoss waterfall are all at risk of damage.

Some of these sites were simply never meant to be popular. The country has an "Icelandic Pledge" that it encourages tourists to take, promising to travel responsibly, camp at campsites and so on. The tap water campaign aimed at tourists is a national effort to cut back on plastic bottles. At gas stations, Styrofoam and paper cups, ubiquitous in the United States, are hard to come by. If you want a coffee to go, you'll often need to bring your own mug or buy a reusable one.

Iceland chairs the Arctic Council and holds the presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and one of its three focuses for the latter is sustainable tourism, including "decarbonization" of the industry. A member of the Paris Agreement, the country aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent of 1990 levels by 2030 and be carbon neutral by 2040. A 50 percent increase to its 2010 carbon tax went into effect last year. Iceland also wants to electrify its vehicle fleet. The impacts of climate change are already apparent, says Guðmundsdóttir. But, she adds, "there's a really strong will in Iceland to preserve nature and maintain tourism as a sustainable industry."

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It's bright and cold when I land in Keflavik. It's summertime, so the sun won't set till around midnight. Driving on near-empty roads to my Airbnb near Hvolsvöllur, I pass purple Alaska lupines, an invasive plant species, blanketing the rolling, rocky hills. There are as many tour buses barreling down the Ring Road, the route that loops the country, as there are cars. Navigating through small towns I see hostels and buildings with Airbnb logos affixed to the windows.

The waterfall by my Airbnb, which you might know as #skogafoss, is majestic. Campers have set up tents near the base, and a woman is furiously adjusting her selfie stick in the spray while climbing the hundreds of steps to the top. As lambs gallop down the grass beside the stairs, the place feels peaceful, even private. I could see the waterfall from a nearby restaurant, which seems emblematic of how tourism affects rural towns — part of the cottage industry supporting the interlopers who are changing these communities.

It's still light when I fall asleep at the Airbnb. A chicken coop backs up to the guesthouse, but the rooster never crows. The next day, my host smiles gently as

Left: The ce and c horse has ved o t e s a d ce the 10th century today t s bred for sheepherd ng competit on and e s re r d ng **Middle:** Vanda sm to plant fe has become a concern for owmq creasi s reports of ntentiona destruction **Bottom:** Landm a adjacent a pop ar k ng dest nat on s surro nded by mounta ns and obs dian ava fields

she presents breakfast: bread made with barley from their farm, homemade dandelion and rhubarb jams, Angelica pesto and lamb paté. The eggs are from their chickens, the milk from their cows Seated around the table are more people from the U.S., including women from California, Florida and Seattle and a man from New York City He was in Europe for work but took advantage of the stopover and is visiting Iceland for about 48 hours

Judy Butler is in Iceland because the airfare to Ireland from her home in Kittery, Maine was too expensive, plus a lot of her colleagues at the school where she teaches English have been here and liked it. Butler and I soon depart for the Sólheimajökull glacier. The trail leads us through an ash-covered icescape that our guide, a British man named Simon Rees, calls Mordor The ash, left over from past volcanic eruptions, insulates the ice, forming dark peaks and valleys near the water's edge.

"First chance for photos for all you instagrammers," Rees says after a few minutes of walking. The actor who plays Jaime Lannister on *Game of Thrones* posted a selfie he took on Sólheimajökull, Rees says before encouraging us to ask him questions about glaciers. Or the TV show I ask about the show First he tells me he didn't like the ending. Then he points to a sign hammered into the earth that marks where the glacier reached back in 2010. According to Rees, it's one of the fastest disappearing in Europe.

"And I'll leave it up to you to decide why," he says, skirting any conversations about climate change. (Soon after my trip, the Copernicus Climate Change Service reports that July was the hottest month ever recorded on Earth.) In brief, he tells us, there's less snow in the winter and more melt in the summer The same amount of ice has

disappeared in the past 10 years as in the past 100. Icebergs sticking out of the lagoon like meringue won't exist by the end of this summer, he says, and he notices more breaking off all the time. Later, he shows me a photo a friend of his took from the same spot in September 2018. There was a wall of ice. Now there's water. Tour guides will need to jump the stream, he says, and then build a bridge.

Above: Jökulsárlón is Iceland's most tourist-friendly glacial lagoon and, with a depth of 814 feet, also its deepest lake — a result of glacial retreat due to rising temperatures spurred by climate change

"Eventually we won't be able to get here at all." Retreating glaciers can be increasingly hard to access, says Nathan Reigner, an Arctic Fulbright Scholar in Reykjavik, but the glacial melt is also creating new sites, like the Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon that formed when glaciers calved and melted along the south coast. As more of these sites have emerged, he says, there has been an "arms race" for who can develop tourism businesses to meet the skyrocketing demand. What one study early in the tourism boom called a "surprising lack of planning and control at the national level" led to a spate of visitors and tour companies that were ignorant of environmental sustainability guidelines.

Reigner is a recreation and tourism consultant with a background in park management, concentrating in part on crowding, capacity and conflict. At a coffee shop in downtown Reykjavik he gives me a primer on Icelandic tourism.

To wit. Tourists have been coming to Iceland since the 19th century. At first it was rich Europeans. By 2008, when the economy crashed, the country hosted about 500,000 visitors a year. The financial crisis's encore was the volcanic eruption that grounded flights on the continent for weeks.

But the krona, already a volatile currency, was down steeply against the dollar. It became cheap to venture here, and Visit Iceland, the country's official tourism arm, rallied to save the 2010 summer tourism season. It worked. By 2013, about 800,000 people were landing in the country each year; by 2017, more than 2.2 million.

As adventure-seekers visited Iceland and exposed their friends and family (or followers) to images of the country, those places became destinations. And Iceland didn't have the structures it needed to support the surge. A range of goods and services have followed the tourists to towns of all sizes. Even Reykjavik has more bars, Reigner says. Locals are

Below: Landmannalaugar ("People's Pools" in Icelandic) is dotted with hot springs and serves as the starting point of the 34-mile Laugavegur hiking trail.

Above: At about 40,000 square miles, Iceland is roughly the same size as Kentucky. Outside the Ring Road, much sightseeing is done via hiking trails, which traverse the country across three national parks.

happy their swimming pools are open later.

During the summer, on any given day, about one in five people on the island are tourists, Reigner says. But as the krona regains its value, visitors are staying for fewer days. That means their land travel is limited. It might be more appealing to stay on, say, the Golden Circle than spend a day driving to a more remote coastal village. This causes problems by concentrating the environmental footprint within a small area. Distributing tourists more evenly across the country can reduce the negative impacts. For example, Keflavik airport currently centers traffic in the country's southwest region, so in 2015 the government resolved to develop new flight routes to lesserknown airports, such as Akureyri in the northeast.

Icelanders are split on how much the tourism industry benefits their communities. Generally they're happy with it, but some feel priced out or crowded out, Reigner says. Others feel Iceland has become a cartoon of itself. The government developed a plan to collect reliable data to improve transportation, infrastructure and more. And, Reigner says, they've been largely successful. By looking at issues including freshwater, wastewater, nature sites and carbon footprints, the country seems to be tackling the conflicts that stem from tourism. Still, many Icelanders believe tourists "spoil" nature. I ask Reigner if he agrees. He leans back in his chair and thinks for a second.

"Intensive use," he says, "requires intensive management." He goes on to say that no "management machine" could have coped with the rapid growth of tourism in Iceland.

"It's not that people did a bad job," he says. "It's that the job is impossible."

When Reigner first visited Iceland, in 2015, he thought it was a playground. Now he thinks about it more holistically. He wishes he could help tourists connect more with the culture, a challenge on a weeklong or weekend trip. Being a tourist means going somewhere to find meaning for yourself, but in doing so you also change the meaning of a place.

Reykjavik surely feels changed, though compared with when, I don't know. The waiter at a downtown restaurant speaks English to me before I say anything. More Americans stumble in, and a Japanese man at the table next to mine demands the wi-fi password. Watching the people pass by outside, I wonder if any of them are from here.

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By the time everyone has boarded the Arctic Adventures minibus for the Golden Circle tour that ferries tourists from Thingvellir National Park to the Geysir geothermal area to the Gullfoss waterfall, 12 of us are buckled in, plus our guide, Heimir. Nine are from the United States and five, including me, live in Texas. A couple from San Antonio tells me about a cave they visited that may be closed because tourists keep scrawling their names in the bacteria covering its walls. The guide showed them one such graffito from 2006 that's still visible today. Cori Clymer, who's here from Philadelphia to celebrate her 50th birthday with her mom, passes around a dried fish snack. Michelle Brinker, from Houston, takes my photo at the national park, a UNESCO world heritage site with a parking lot full of sightseeing buses. One tourist climbs over the rope installed to keep visitors away from a cliff. He wants a better photo.

One story Heimir tells us about tourists sits with me longer than the rest. It dates to the early 2000s, before the tourism boom. People hoping to see a UFO land on a glacier had descended on Reykjavik, renting cars and driving into the rural countryside. Many ran out of gas before they could find filling stations. Others showed up at overbooked hotels. The region wasn't equipped to host so many people at once, but farmers opened their doors and welcomed the ignorant travelers. That same hospitality is on show today among Airbnb hosts and restaurant servers who patiently wait while I fumble to find the correct amount of krona to pay for a meal. For my final dinner in Iceland I eat at Skal, in a food hall in Reykjavik. (An American suggested it.) Sitting at the bar, I order a skirt steak that another American, sitting nearby, recommended. After it's placed in front of me, the woman next to me nods and smiles. I feel as though I've finally earned a local's approval, but when she speaks, it's clear she's American.

"So good," she says. Then she pulls out her phone. ■

THE PLAYBOY SYMPOSIUM

BY **MATT MCGORRY**

Growing up, I didn't think much about my gender and the effect it had on my life. How things have changed: As I sit here writing this just after turning 33, I'm able to look back and see the many ways who I am has been shaped by what was expected of me, as a boy and then as a man. A lifetime of striving to fit into society's expectations of manhood had stripped me of so much of my humanity that I couldn't even recognize it at the time. I signed a bad contract. And now I'm lighting that shit on fire.

Until five years ago, I'd never read the fine print of this contract. I signed it, like most of us do, without considering the negative impact of everything deemed "just the way things are." Unfortunately, people following patterns they see as the norm have been the cause of many of the world's greatest injustices. Going with the flow can grant us power and social standing, but at what cost to ourselves and others?

It didn't take long for me to realize that having 17.5-inch arms and an almost 600-pound dead lift caused people to look at me in a way that made me feel powerful — not just physically but socially as well. In a culture that teaches men to be dominant, I found myself building a body and a persona that would demand respect by being "better" than others. I did this often at the expense of my humanity and integrity. For all the time many of us men spend trying to be "good enough" or "better than," when was the last time we saw a man apply the same effort to becoming more honest and compassionate? At the root of these extraordinary human qualities is the ability to be vulnerable, a quality too often seen as weak and "unmanly," something most of us are taught to avoid at all costs. Going against the grain can be costly, but not nearly as costly as slowly bludgeoning our own humanity into submission.

We all know the rules in the bold-type section of the male contract. I, like many of you, had learned them so well that they just felt natural. Being respectful of women doesn't necessarily give us the same social power as hooking up as often as possible and then feeling the affirmation of the head nods we get when telling other guys about it. Like most boys, I was taught we should get as far as girls would let us. I was taught our worth depended on our ability to deliver. Not knowing about sex, not being confident about it and not wanting it were never options. And so, in making our sexual relationships a determinant of our social value, we learned to dehumanize women to fulfill what was expected of us. Many of us lied to our friends about getting to third base, boasted about whom we'd hooked up with and never actually asked for permission to go further. We didn't ask because we didn't want to be seen as unsure, or perhaps because we didn't know or didn't care how hard it is for most women to have to say no. Our expectations of women and our own drive to "conquer" led us to give them the culturally recognizable labels of "tease" and "prude" when they didn't do what we wanted. And then we would shame them by calling them "sluts" and "hos" for doing the same things boys and men did — things that made us "players" and "pimps."

Once I began to recognize the double standards of sexism, I entered the fight for gender equity, thinking I was doing it for women. I soon realized I was doing it for myself and other men. The roles we're expected to play based on our gender are damaging to everyone. Patriarchy is a social system of male domination that harms women and those who identify as gender nonconforming. But it also hurts men: It forces our allegiance to a system that will never allow us to be truly free, that insists we remain dominant and in control. The contract requires that we cut off and numb integral parts of ourselves so we're incapable of fully knowing and expressing our emotions, or of being whole. How can we have integrity and be true to our values if we're expected to uphold our end of this oppressive bargain?

I've succeeded in many of the ways men in our culture are taught to aspire to. I've had success in my career as an actor, earning fame and a decent paycheck. I was a nationally ranked powerlifter. And yet I was left with profound insecurity and a sense of emptiness. How could it be any other way when my selfworth relied on having to prove myself over and over again?

Mutual liberation was the antidote to my despair. I wholeheartedly believe that when we're our best selves, we fight for what is right even when we know we'll get pushback. Courage and integrity require this of us. I have gone through a reorientation of my heart and soul, and I know that the work of growing to understand myself better, and to effect positive change, will never be complete. Reclaiming my humanity is dependent on resisting societal pressures that tell me to conform to the status quo, that tell me to be silent about injustice and to normalize oppression, hate and even my own deep-seated biases.

Take a moment to picture the "all-American man." If you're like most people, you visualize someone who looks like me: a straight, white, cisgender man with a "strong build." Over time, I learned how this default image had impacted my life and given me false confidence in my ability to be objective. If, while growing up, I never had to think much about what it meant to be a man, I certainly didn't think much about what it meant to be white. When we're in the dominant group, we rarely have to examine how our identities impact our survival, the way LGBTQ people, women, people of color, poor people and disabled people do.

In order for us to stand a chance at claiming our full humanity and embodying an expansive and inclusive worldview, we must be willing to go out of our way. We've grown up in a culture that teaches us to devalue the perspectives of the most marginalized. I did this for most of my life without even realizing it. But if we're ever to create a world where everyone is truly valued, safe and free, we must learn to listen to the voices from the farthest margins. We must assume the same, if not higher, levels of competency and objectivity in those who don't fit the image of the "all-American man."

It is my honor to bring in four leaders whose voices, perspectives and brilliance need to be heard. By listening, with open hearts and open minds, we will grow to better understand others, the world we live in and, ultimately, ourselves.

In the words of one of my sheroes, Angela Davis, "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."

Matt McGorry is an activist and actor known for roles on Orange Is the New Black and How to Get Away With Murder.

A FAT BLACK POLITICS OF DESIRE

BY **SONYA RENEE TAYLOR**

When the Australian reporter called to ask me my thoughts on the article and photos in PLAYBOY featuring pop singer Lizzo, I promptly put the journalist on hold and googled the pics. I love Lizzo, but the thought of perusing a PLAYBOY magazine had not occurred to me since 1991, when I "found" a decade's worth of old issues stacked in my uncle's dresser drawers like bars of gold. Snooping through his things when he lived in our basement was a regular activity of mine, particularly because he had so much porn. Thumbing through those pages, I learned everything and nothing about my own sexuality, my own desirability

Desire, according to my uncle's magazines, was blonde, cleanshaven, thin and white. Desire was red lips and a pouting mouth, and desire appeared to always be posing suggestively… with fruit. Uncle had other magazines. They were explicit and crass. black girls with pendulous breasts squirting milk or sprawling spreadeagle with their fingers rambling through thick black pubic hair. Every running joke I'd ever heard about PLAYBOY seemed to focus on how people read it "for the articles," an allusion to the supposedly more sophisticated palate the magazine was said to cater to Erudite people read PLABYOY.

The fat black woman's body has always been a marvel—even when the world found it grotesque, it found it spectacular.

Those tasteful people (read: men) didn't want smut, they wanted beauty and class They wanted thin, white, clean-shaven visions of desire. If the women in PLAYBOY were classy and beautiful, by default the women in the other magazines, the women with skin and hair like mine, must be smut. Dark girls were carnal but not desired. They were indeed objects of lust but not of beauty. If what I deduced about desire and beauty from these magazines was true, then what would I, could I, be as a sexual being in this body?

The fat black woman's body has always been a marvel even when the world found it grotesque, it found it spectacular When Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman was abducted and enslaved by European colonizers to be exhibited naked in a cage beside a baby rhinoceros, it was the epic swell of her butt and thighs, her pronounced labia and deep brown complexion that induced white folks to pay their money to gawk at her. This is what fat black girls like me came to expect for our bodies. I knew men might watch my ass sway beneath a sundress when I walked to the corner store in July. Men would spit their hunger toward me, spectators graciously detailing the myriad ways they would consume this prey set in motion before them. Of course it was my duty to appreciate that someone might want to devour me, that someone might want this undesirable body

Not until I saw myself reflected in the brilliant tapestry of other black women women I desired did I begin to see desire and beauty as possible in my own being. But those women were not in magazine spreads. They were in kitchens in Oakland and Baltimore I met them in mediation circles and at marches. Black women pouring into the streets to protest the murders of unarmed black bodies it was in these sacred spaces that I saw how we are lovers and healers, desired and wholly beautiful. It was black women who told me I was a being of magnificence and sumptuous delight, and it wasn't until I began believing them that I was truly liberated into the fullness of a sexuality formed of my own definitions. Lizzo is gorgeous in her spread, but she is we fat black girls have always been worthy of desire and respect, and we never needed a magazine to tell us that

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Sonya Renee Taylor is founder of the Body Is Not an Apology movement and author of The Body Is Not an Apology The Power of Radical Self-Love.

ON NONTOXIC MASCULINITY

BY **RICHIE RESEDA**

By the time most of us are 12, we've punched someone for pride, lied about sex for cool cred and called another boy "gay" for not being "man enough." This is what toxic masculinity teaches us that we're measured by our physical prowess, by how much money we make and how many womxn we "have." (Womxn is a spelling many feminists use instead of women, to recognize the independence of womxn from men.) But what do we do when we're ready to ditch these chains?

Consent doesn't start in the bedroom — it starts with the first glance. Feeling attracted to someone doesn't entitle me to stare, linger or look them up and down. Contrary to what music videos and middle school taught me, it's not sexy — it's creepy. Just like it's not okay to express sexuality with my body to people who aren't down, it's not okay to express it with my face either.

The same goes for my mouth. Toxic masculinity dictates that I verbally express sexualized appraisal at all times, that these are "compliments." But they're not. Rather than assume people want to talk at all, I've found it's best to ask for permission and start with regular conversation. "Hi, can I talk to you?" works great. And if they say no, well, that means no.

I sometimes struggle with the idea that my manhood, and therefore my value, doesn't originate in my wallet. I drive a 1992 Acura Integra that looks like it once decorated a telephone pole. It gets me where I need to go without problems, but I feel embarrassed.

The toxic devil on my shoulder tells me that I should be in a Model S, that driving a more expensive car would make me bigger, more powerful, more "manly." To escape this mythology, I remember that I'm not valued by what I make but by what I give. Driving a sensible car gives me the freedom to support friends and family financially when need be, and to donate to causes I believe in. This reminds me that my purpose is to help, not to ball out.

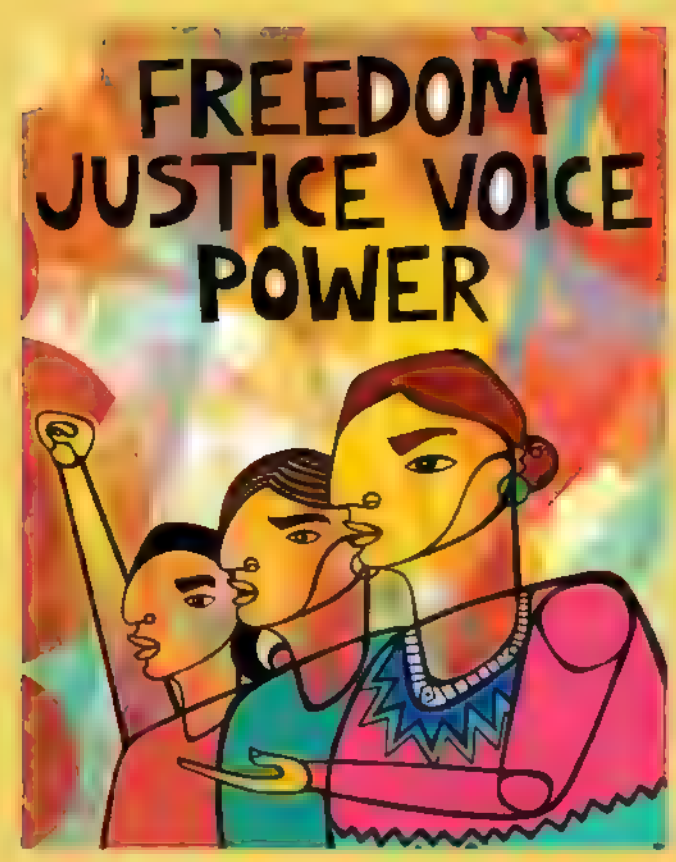
Getting man points for physically dominating others with athleticism or violence is another tough one to shake. It's insidious, because I know choosing not to play this domination game can get me hurt, or at least ridiculed with insults that liken me to "weak" people like womxn and queer folks.

Combating this takes courage, dedication and tolerance for discomfort. When someone "disrespects" me or the people I'm with, I must have the confidence to resist the urge to bark back, get revenge or "come out on top." I instead seek resolution and prioritize safety. This doesn't guarantee I'll be safe, but neither does violence.

Today, this is revolutionary — to pursue solutions instead of domination. But it's vital. Violence escalates when I fight fire with fire rather than with water. Fighting with water doesn't mean allowing myself to be victimized; it means the opposite. The nontoxic way to deal with conflict is to solve problems rather than to "prove myself."

This is why toxic masculinity is easy. It means going with the flow and being cool with it when the river cascades off a mountain. Nontoxic masculinity is hard. It means swimming upstream…but it beats falling off a cliff.

Richie Reseda is a formerly incarcerated feminist, organizer and producer of Indigo Mateo's 2019 album, Intuition.



ON PRIVILEGE AND FREEDOM

BY **MUNROE BERGDORF**

We are living in a time of social recalibration. Our understanding of oppressive structures has never been as widely acknowledged, discussed or deconstructed within the mainstream as it is today. The language we use for this is expanding, thanks to decades of thought put to paper, largely by womxn, people of color and the LGBTQ community, about what it means to be seen as "less than" by those who hold social power.

Discussions surrounding race, gender identity, sexual orientation and other factors have helped us identify which crosssections of society are most likely to be placed at a social disadvantage These conversations have benefited greatly from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading American scholar of critical race theory who coined the term *intersectionality* in the late 1980s, today, intersectional feminism recognizes the political and social disparities that impact our identities. The experience of an upper-class, white, cisgender, heterosexual woman will differ from that of a working-class, black, transgender, queer woman. And in understanding that difference in experience, we can understand and pinpoint systems of oppression such as racism, transphobia and sexism in a more nuanced way

It wasn't until I discovered Crenshaw's work that I felt truly close to feminism I found so much of the feminist theory I had been exposed to either dismissive of womxn who hadn't been assigned female at birth, or focused primarily on the needs and experiences of Western white womxn I craved a branch of feminism that took into consideration the fact that womxn don't come in one form. We all have different stories, different struggles and different lessons to teach one another, so it's vital that the womxn's liberation movement reflect that

Intersectional feminism allows us to see who holds power within society through the lens of privilege

a word often used in discussions of social justice today. Privilege is the recognition that some of us are afforded a head start by virtue of our identity. Privilege doesn't mean your life has been easy, it just means it would have been harder had you also been born X. It's important to recognize that privilege isn't fixed, just as our identities aren't fixed we change as human beings throughout our lives, and so may our social privilege

With all this language being adopted into the mainstream consciousness, it's important to note that this expanded terminology isn't necessarily new. It originated largely from conversations that have been going on within marginalized communities for a long time. The fact that you may not have heard them until now is due largely to the historic lack of diverse voices within the mainstream, and limited discussion of racism and prejudice in a real, nuanced way from the perspective of those who experience them. Terms such as *mansplaining, cultural appropriation, white guilt, hetero normativity* and *cisgender* help us disestablish certain behaviors and identities as "normal," thus allowing those who are marginalized not to be seen as "other." Being straight and cisgender may be common, but common isn't the same as normal. There's power in the language we choose, and there's freedom in our willingness to understand how it affects others who don't have what we have

It would have been hard to imagine even 10 years ago the conversations we're now having about our different experiences in society. Maybe we got too comfortable within the boundaries of our privilege, or numb within our oppression. But if we've learned anything since the start of the #MeToo movement, it's that we must never be complacent, because those who would wind back our freedom of choice, expression and identity are anything but We must stay active, we must stay vocal, we must stay informed. In the quest for equality, we must be conscious of what we're striving to be equal with and certain that we don't repeat the oppressive behavior of some privileged communities. Freedom must come from reconfiguring society in a way that's inclusive and not reliant on the exploitation, suppression or ostracism of any societal cross-sections Freedom has to be a consistent and sustainable goal freedom for all, not just power for some.

Munroe Bergdorf is a London-based activist and model

SOME OF THE MEN ARE VICTIMS. SOME OF THE MEN ARE HARM DOERS

BY **DARNELL L. MOORE**

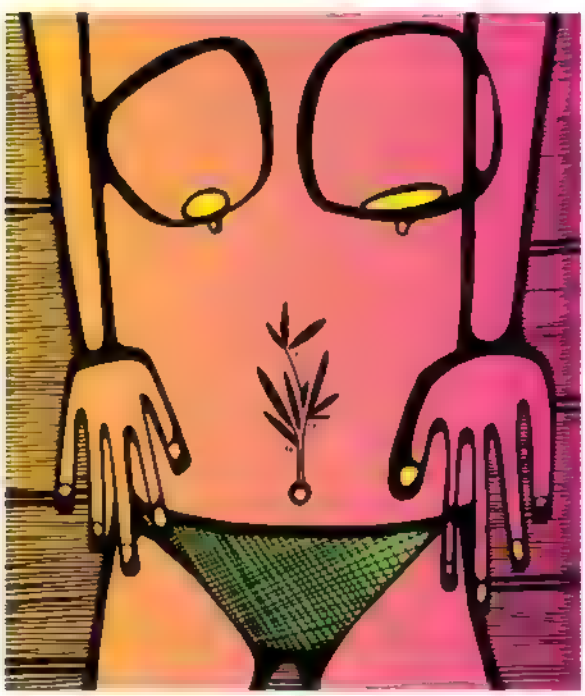
I returned to my friend's house to let him know I'd made a decision to move on. What we'd shared had complicated our bond — especially the best parts we'd hidden and feared others would discover.

We were two men in our mid-20s who were not yet free. We were broken and often demonstrated our love by breaking each other with ease. I knew as much and had readied myself to leave the man who had been, at times, my best friend, my brother, my confidant, my colleague, my sex partner, my secret, my nightmare and my only desire.

I sat opposite him on the couch in his bedroom. I didn't sit on the bed, because positioning myself too close to him, in the very spot where we'd broken the rules that real men are taught to follow, would have signaled an invitation to return to where we once were.

His eyes were fixed on me. My eyes were locked onto my hands. His words were precise — there would be no ending to the friendship whose very beginning was complicated because of our secret. I knew I needed to leave, however.

And then he grabbed and pulled and held and pushed me down and resisted my resistance and took off my clothes. I pulled away and removed his hands and clenched my lips and resisted his insistence until I finally stopped and froze and lay there while he broke the rule that real men are taught is okay to break.



Seven years we shared a friendship, and that is how it ended. It would take another seven years after that ending before I was able to put a name to what had transpired.

I wanted to be wrong. I wanted to believe that love was enough, that our long history of sexual intimacy was enough and that the realities of our complicated friendship were enough to reconsider that what had occurred was rape.

I did not want to believe I was a victim; I am a man. And before I was a man, I was a boy who was forced to have sex with an older female relative who tried to convince me that my body was not mine. And real men can't be victims because real men fight back.

No real man would allow his body to be pillaged. But I didn't fight back because I was in shock. I loved my friend. Real men take; they're never taken. I'd had sex many times throughout my life not realizing that fact.

Men are taught to ignore every "no" offered because our "yes" is the final word. And even now, as I reckon with the confusion left from that moment, I'm clear that I was taught the same lesson.

An intimate's "yes" is an invitation. Like so many men, I was not taught to be welcomed into another's space. I was not explicitly told that I needed permission to touch the body of another. I was not encouraged to take the time to ask about another's desire. But I know that if I'm to land on the other side of violence and in a place where my humanity is left intact, I have to refuse all the lies about manhood that I've been taught are true. I have to move beyond all I've learned and aim to be a better lover, a better intimate, a better human — for the sake of others and myself.

And I must not forget that intimacy, in its various forms, can be a safe horizon to which we men ascend if we aren't led to believe we're at our best when we leave behind the broken pieces of those with whom we engage. The consequence of our respect — of others' bodies, of others' needs, of others' spirits — is wholeness.

Darnell L. Moore is head of U.S. strategy and programs at Breakthrough, a human rights organization, and author of No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black & Free in America

PLAYBOY'S party jokes

TAKEOVER TIME! THIS BATCH COMES TO YOU VIA *THE LATE LATE SHOW* HEAD WRITER **IAN KARMEL** AND A FEW FIERCELY FUNNY FRIENDS

SEX with me is like a trip to Epcot Center. It sucks. —*I.K.*

I'M not saying men are desperate, but I once said "I love the band Elton John" on a date, and the man still slept with me. —*Marcia Belsky*

I don't think of a man as an ally until he hands me his unlocked cell phone and walks out of the room. —*Bri Pruett*

THE year is 2055. An elderly husband and wife are reading in bed. The wife turns to the husband and says, "Kyle, I want you to fuck me like you fucked me on our wedding night."

The husband puts his book down. "Honey, I'd love to," he says, "but I simply don't have $80,000 worth of student debt for you to absorb anymore." —*I.K.*

THREESOMES *sound* like a great idea, but so does a boxing league of kangaroos. —*Amy Silverberg*

POLYAMORY is a lot like a graduate program, full of vegan parents scheduling things. —*B.P.*

A taco salad is the perfect food for making people think you're eating healthy: *Salad* is right there in the name, but it's actually just the biggest possible taco. —*I.K.*

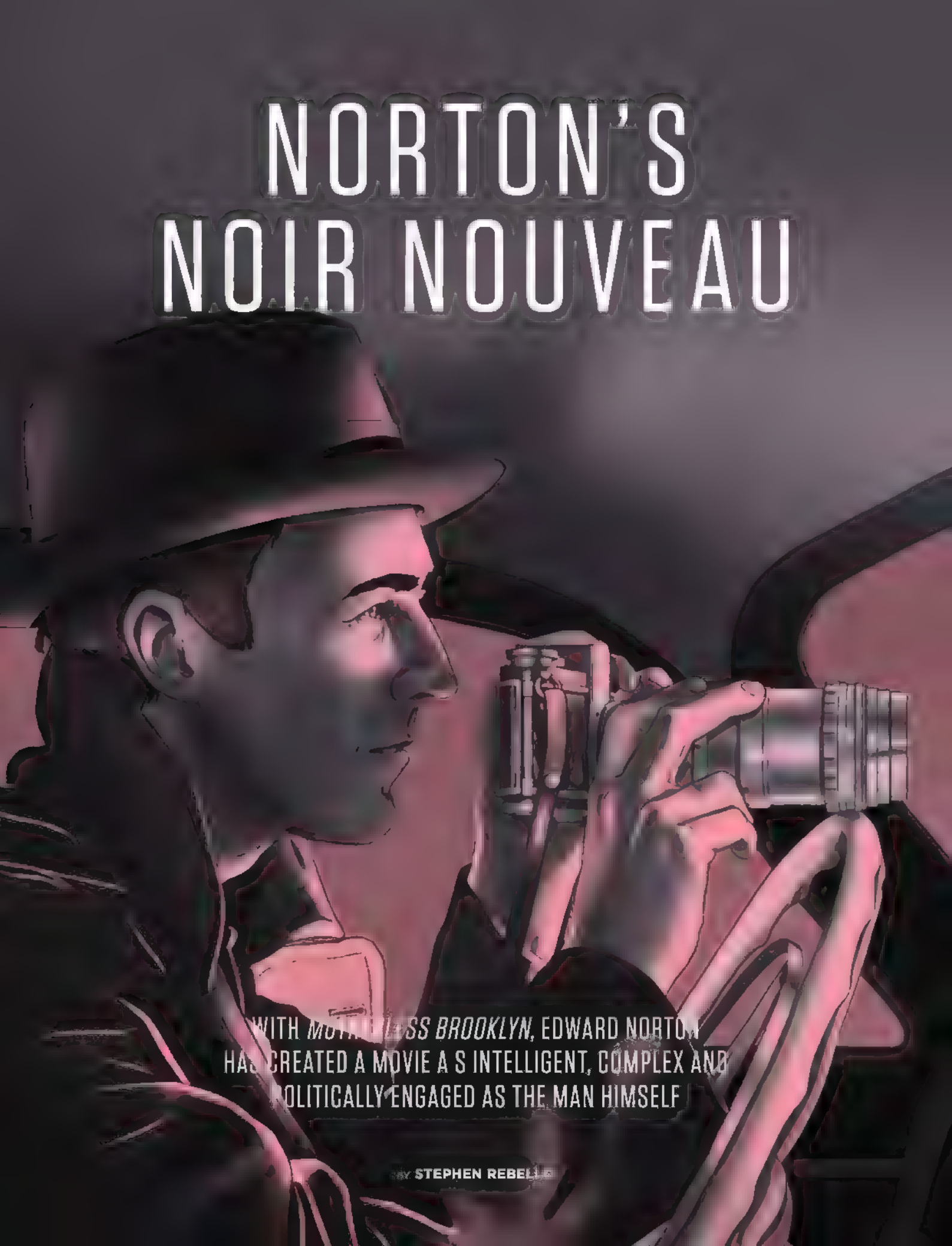
I once dated a girl whose dog Rufus would watch us having sex. Then I found and destroyed his webcam, and that was that. —*I.K.*

HAVING sex in your 30s is like being a urologist. Mostly you're just telling men their dicks are fine. —*B.P.*

A girl once told me she wanted to fuck like we were in a porno, so I arranged for my dad to marry her. —*I.K.*

OUR Unabashed Dictionary now includes the following variations on the term *sexting*.
Flexting: Sexy texting at the gym.
Brexting: Sexy texting while legally separating from the European Union.
Tex-mexting: Sexy texting with Bobby Flay.
BDSMS: Sexy texting while wearing a latex hood, and also your 4G went out.
—*I.K.*

NORTON'S NOIR NOUVEAU



WITH *MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN*, EDWARD NORTON HAS CREATED A MOVIE A S INTELLIGENT, COMPLEX AND POLITICALLY ENGAGED AS THE MAN HIMSELF

BY STEPHEN REBELLO

The thing about Edward Norton is he was never really here — or so it seemed. Sure, as a 26-year-old in his first big movie, 1996's *Primal Fear*, his hair-raising performance as a possibly homicidal altar boy nabbed him an Oscar nomination. Critics and moviegoers started asking, between breathless comparisons to everyone from DiCaprio to Hoffman, *Who is this guy?*

But as vivid as he could be on-screen, offscreen Norton ghosted us all. Letting the work tell the story, he made a shell game out of his dealings with the press, shunning interviews and ducking questions about his personal life — especially when he bulked up by 30 pounds and scored a best actor Oscar nomination for his gut-wrenching neo-Nazi turn in 1998's *American History X*.

Through the aughts, Norton continued to protect his off-camera life while keeping his screen profile high, if unclassifiable. He mostly avoided Hollywood cash grabs, gravitating instead to a range of complex roles: a pornographer's soft- spoken lawyer, a feckless drug dealer, a bipolar dude with a latent flair for violence, a green superhero with rage issues and an egomaniacal actor — for, respectively, cream-of-the-crop directors Milos Forman (*The People vs Larry Flynt*), Spike Lee (*25th Hour*), David Fincher (*Fight Club*), Louis Leterrier (*The Incredible Hulk*) and Alejandro G. Iñarritu (*Birdman*, yet another Oscar nomination).

By then a certain reputation had emerged, one fed by Norton's widely publicized head-on collisions with the directors of *American History X* and *Red Dragon* and the battles with Marvel that likely factored into Mark Ruffalo taking over as the Hulk. One common denominator: By many accounts, if Norton thought a script needed an overhaul, he'd doctor it himself and try to persuade the director to get onboard.

Then he went relatively quiet, aside from supporting turns in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Collateral Beauty*, and voice stints in *Sausage Party* (he helped Seth Rogen get that one made) and *Isle of Dogs*. Was Norton staging a vanishing act? Had he become one of those actors, per endless online speculation, that *Hollywood won't hire?*

Not so fast. Aside from being busy as a husband (to movie producer Shauna Robertson), the father of a now six-year-old son, a scuba diver and pilot, a tireless environmental advocate, a trustee of an affordable-housing nonprofit and a producer on more than a dozen documentaries and feature films (including last year's Gotti), Norton has been quietly preparing to step back into the spotlight.

The $26 million movie *Motherless Brooklyn*, in wide release this November, revolves around his performance as Lionel Essrog — a sad, solitary private detective with Tourette syndrome who struggles to make sense of a morally and politically rancid world following the murder of his mobbed-up mentor (Bruce Willis). Watching the gritty yet open- heartedly romantic movie, which Norton also directed, produced and adapted from Jonathan Lethem's 1999 novel, you can almost feel the man stepping out and showing us what matters to him, what's eating at him, what he thinks of the state of things in America in 2019. *So that's who Edward Norton is.*

Speaking almost as rapidly and obsessively as his gumshoe protagonist, Norton describes his near 20-year campaign to launch the movie, whose knockout cast includes Alec Baldwin, Willem Dafoe, Bobby Cannavale, Gugu Mbatha-Raw (pictured above with Norton in a scene from the film), Michael K. Williams and Leslie Mann. "My emotional connection to the book was this character who lets you know from the beginning, 'I've got something wrong with my head,' " he says. "You almost instinctively feel aligned with him from square one, because you're inside his brain and you feel how fucked-up and chaotic his condition is. You can hear from deep down inside that he's not, as people call him, a 'freak show' but a smart, sensitive soul. In many ways, he's in the best tradition of afflicted underdog heroes, like in *Rain Man, Forrest Gump, A Beautiful Mind, Good Will Hunting*. We connect with our better selves by cheering for them."

While Lethem set his novel in contemporary New York, Norton's script throws things back to paranoid, bigoted urban life in the 1950s, pitting his hero against a set of social attitudes, prejudices and politically powerful monsters that, in the dark shadow of current events, seem all too apt. "I wanted to do a serious noir," he explains, "not the clichéd, glossy, Americanized dime-store version — a movie that said, 'Look, there's a lot of skeevy shit going on, a lot of stuff churning underneath the surface, and we ignore it at our peril.' I mean, it isn't coincidental that *Chinatown* arrived on the cusp of Watergate, the end of the Vietnam war and after its director's wife had been murdered by Manson followers. I set this movie in a 1950s New York that was beyond crime, when things were being done at a level so antagonistic to what we think of as 'America' that the city was under the almost autocratic, imperial rule of a Darth Vader who exerted his will on everything."

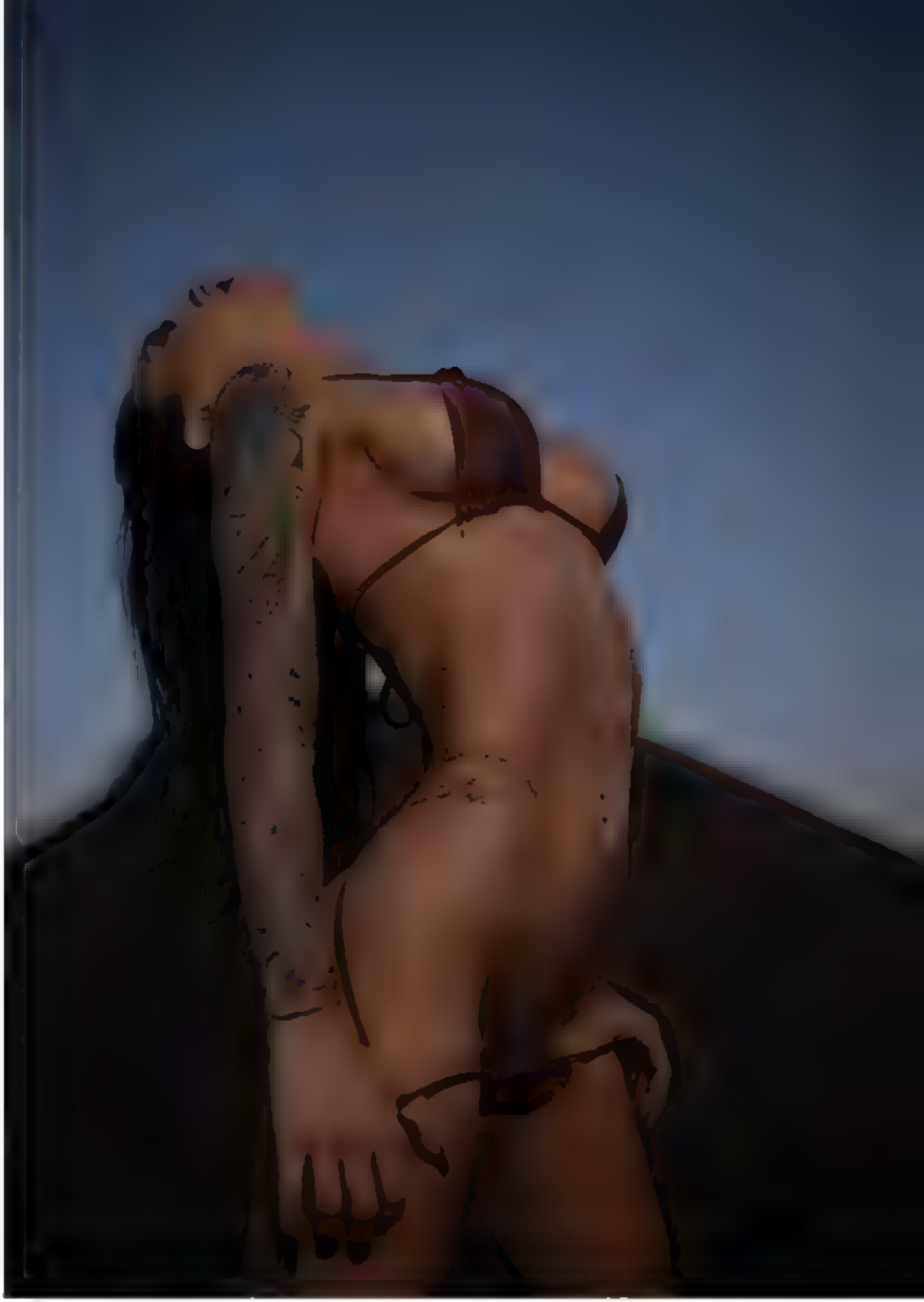
As perfectionistic and self-critical as Norton can be about his work behind and before the camera (of this project he admits, "I have a sort of creeping contentment about it"), he's effusive when it comes to his collaborators — including his aforementioned Darth Vader, played by Baldwin.

"Alec has such a unique combination of charm and terrible power to intimidate," Norton says. "I wrote quite an aria for him, a celebration of brute power. And when he dug down and delivered that monologue in which his character talks about how, if he wanted to do it with a 'colored girl' in a hotel room, then pow, he was going to do it as his right and privilege, he was lethal. I saw the crew's jaws hit the floor."

Cast as the movie's most abusive power broker, Baldwin conjures the toxic essence of the influential predators and racists currently making headlines. Therein may lie the key to Norton's elusive, undeniable genius.

"The best feeling," he says, "is when it resonates like a tuning fork with the times we live in." ■

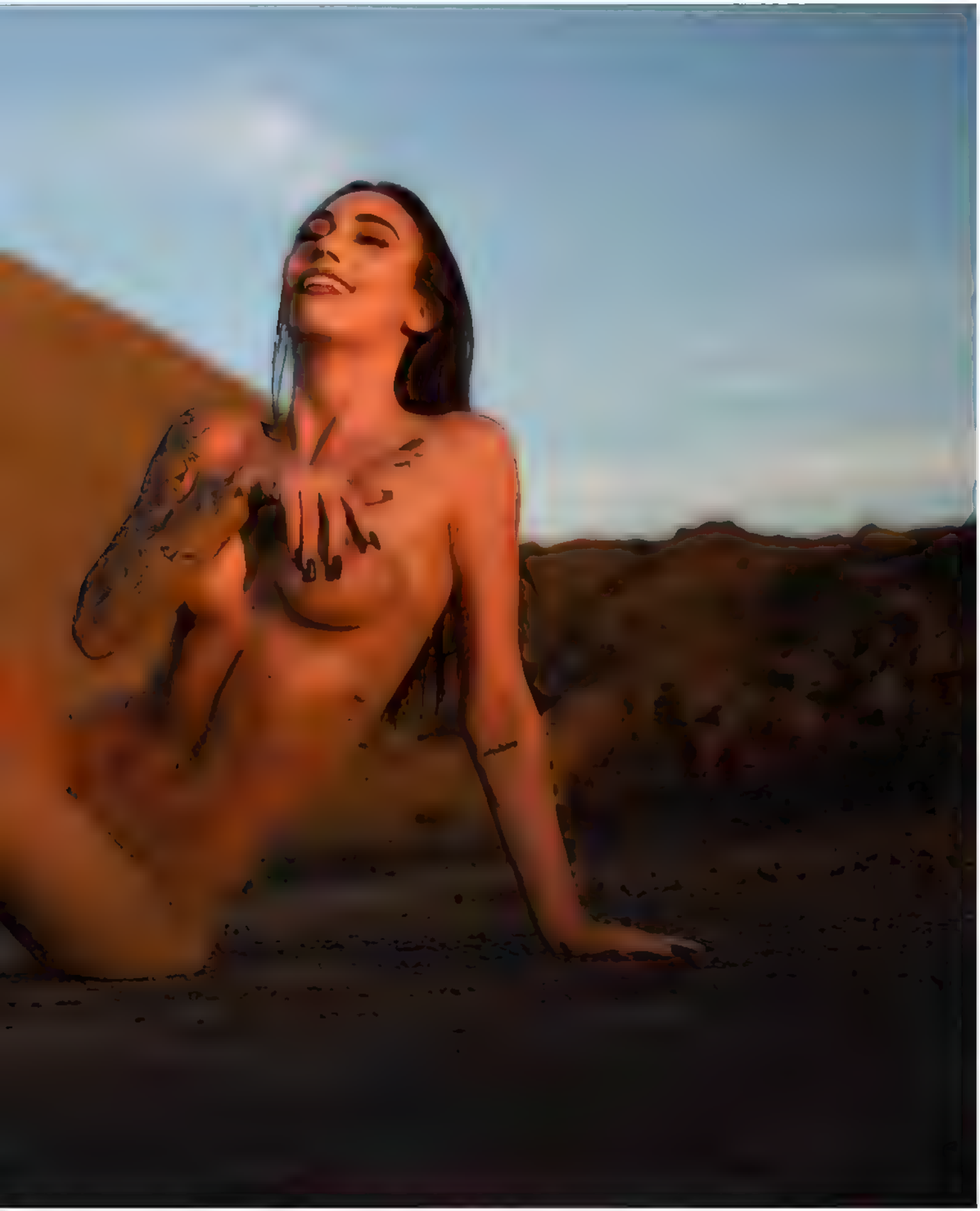
ILLUSTRATION BY **SARAH MAXWELL**



Tara Green

Instagram **@_itstaragreen**

Photography by **Chelsee Sommerfeldt | @xox.chelsee**
MUA **Keisha Utas | @keishautas**



Could you tell us a bit about yourself? I was born on Vancouver Island, graduated h gh school early, and took on the big world at a young age. I'm well-traveled and always played sports. Volleyball was always my favorite! I now currently teach Pi ates on the side of modeling

Can you give us a background on your career and where it all started? My modeling journey began when I was qu te young, as it was always a huge dream of mine. I remember going to model ng interv ews, the rejection, and the emotions that came with not only that but once you're to d so many times you can't do something, unfortunately, you start to be eve it. Over the years it's taken a lot of tria and error but the power of perseverance is huge! Desp te everything, I kept pushing to reach where I am today, and for that, I am incredibly grateful

What's one thing you've learned about yourself? Throughout my journey, there were times of exhaustion, self-doubt, and lack of confidence to say the least. However, I have learned that I do what it takes to overcome the obstac es and hurdles p.aced in my path

What is the biggest misconception people have about you? When it comes to a m sconcept on, the biggest I wou d have to say is that mode ng is easy Mode ing takes immense time and dedication! There is so much more to modeling than what meets the eye A hectic schedule can be exhausting and feel overwhelm ng at times For me, med tation helps maintain my focus and clarity

Do you have any hidden talents, if so what is it? My friends would say, comedian I'm always quick and witty with my comebacks Who doesn't enjoy a bit of banter? Banter is the key to my heart after all

In what ways do you use your platform to inspire or influence others? I've always remained my true authentic self by being honest with fe's tr als whether it be ups or downs. I encourage others to dig deep and find the strength within to ach eve their best self as it's not always easy

What message do you hope to convey through your work? I believe true beauty les within, everyone with a good heart is unique y beautifu

How do you prepare mentally and physically for a big photoshoot or event? It's crunch time!! No treats for th s girl here At these times I am most strict with my mea prep, planning, and meditation. However, when it's all said and done, I do love to splurge on my favorite desserts!

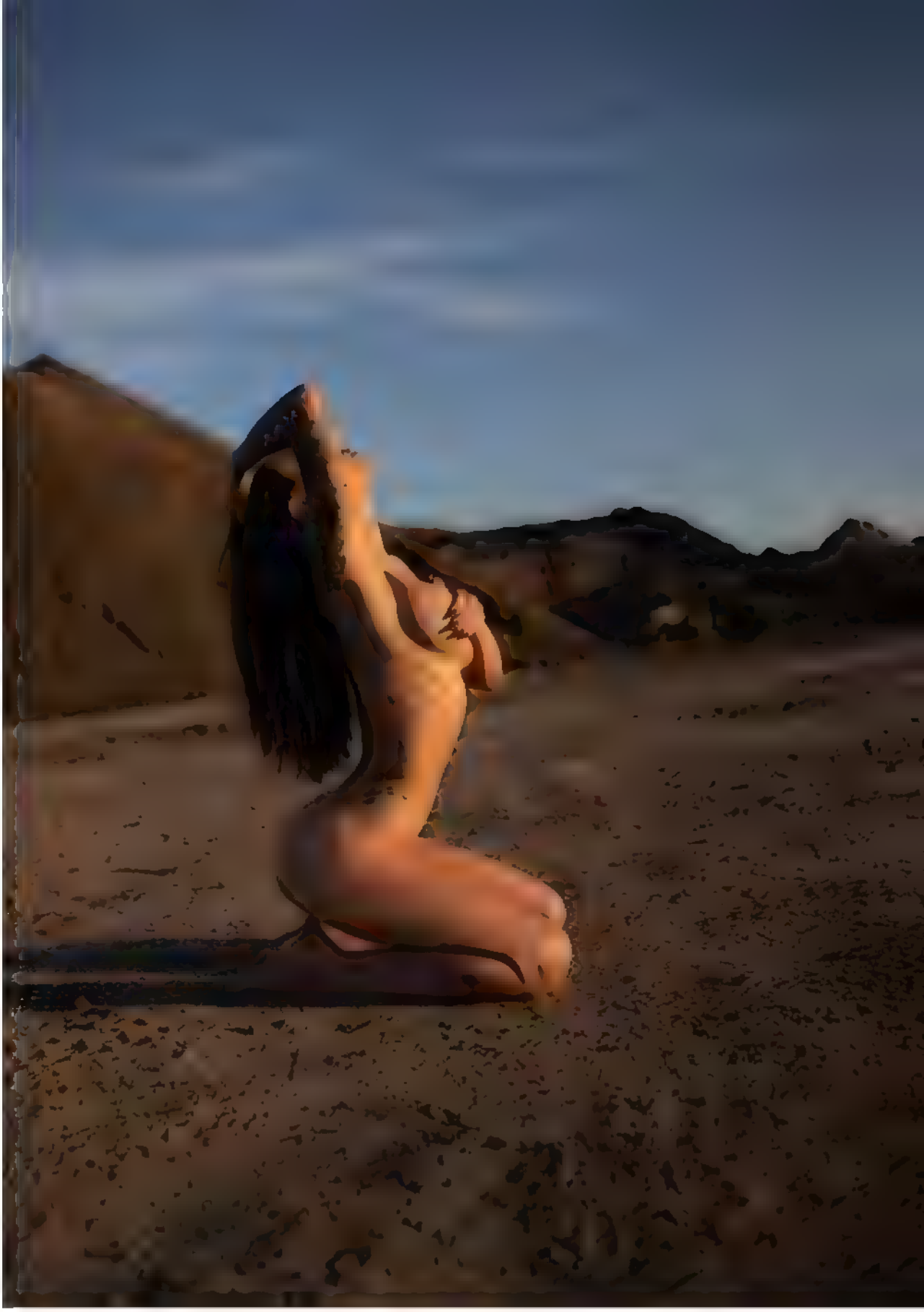
When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? I'm a true nature over There's just something about the countryside's fresh air and the dirt back roads that takes my breath away

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? Okay, here it goes... to my surpr.se, a gent eman's wife approached me while vacationing in Wh stler, BC. She asked for a signed piece of, let's just ca it ingerie! She explained that she and her husband had recogn zed me from.. that part's a secret! Need ess to say, I made their vacat on a hit

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Hmm, what would it be.? A hammock to en,oy the sunset? No, no, wa t! I'll definite y need bug spray. Oh no, it's getting dark! Yup, it's a flashlight, definitely a flashlight as this girl is scared of the dark

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? I'll scream for ice cream! I mean we all do, right? Ooft, nothing gets me like bubb e gum and cotton candy on my sweet day.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words or advice for our readers? Stay focused and motivated to reach your goals, you are your biggest compet tion and hardest cr tic. Don't forget beauty begins within



FACES OF

RESILIENCE

ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STONEWALL RIOTS, WE JOIN THE TREVOR PROJECT TO CELEBRATE HOW FAR WE'VE COME — AND RAISE AWARENESS OF THE WORK THAT STILL NEEDS TO BE DONE TO SECURE EQUALITY FOR ALL

BY **NICO LANG**

Fifty years ago, Larry Littlejohn wrote a letter to PLAYBOY condemning a method of treatment intended to "cure" homosexuality. Littlejohn, who served as president of San Francisco's Society for Individual Rights, described the case of a 22-year-old patient "treated for transvestism" through aversion techniques. After showing the patient photos of himself dressed in women's clothing, Littlejohn claimed, doctors injected the individual with apomorphine. Sometimes used to treat Parkinson's disease, the drug also induces "headaches, nausea and vomiting."

"It had been planned to put him through 72 'trials,' " Littlejohn wrote, "but the last four had to be abandoned because he became irritable, confused and hostile, developed rigors, high temperature and high blood pressure, suffered from impaired coordination and was unable to maintain a normal conversation."

Although doctors had declared the patient "cured" of his condition, Littlejohn noted that another person subjected to electroshock therapy, this time as treatment to cure homosexuality, "wept for half an hour after each session." He eventually refused further sessions after "rushing out of the room in tears."

"I cannot see where this form of treatment differs from the tortures of the Inquisition or the brainwashing of the Communists," Littlejohn concluded.

His letter to the editor was published in March 1969 — four months before the Stonewall riots, during which activists including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera fought back against police brutality at gay bars in New York City's West Village. But 50 years after the six-day protest kick-started what would become the modern LGBTQ movement, the treatment Littlejohn described remains legal in 34 states in this country. New York passed statewide legislation to ban the practice only in January.

Today such treatments are widely known as conversion therapy, though they're sometimes referred to as "reparative therapy" or "orientation change." The terms refer to a loosely associated range of practices including everything from shock treatment and aversion therapy to waterboarding and ice baths. In the vast majority of cases, though, conversion therapy takes the form of talk therapy wherein LGBTQ individuals meet with a counselor or pastor who teaches them that who they are is "sick" and "wrong."

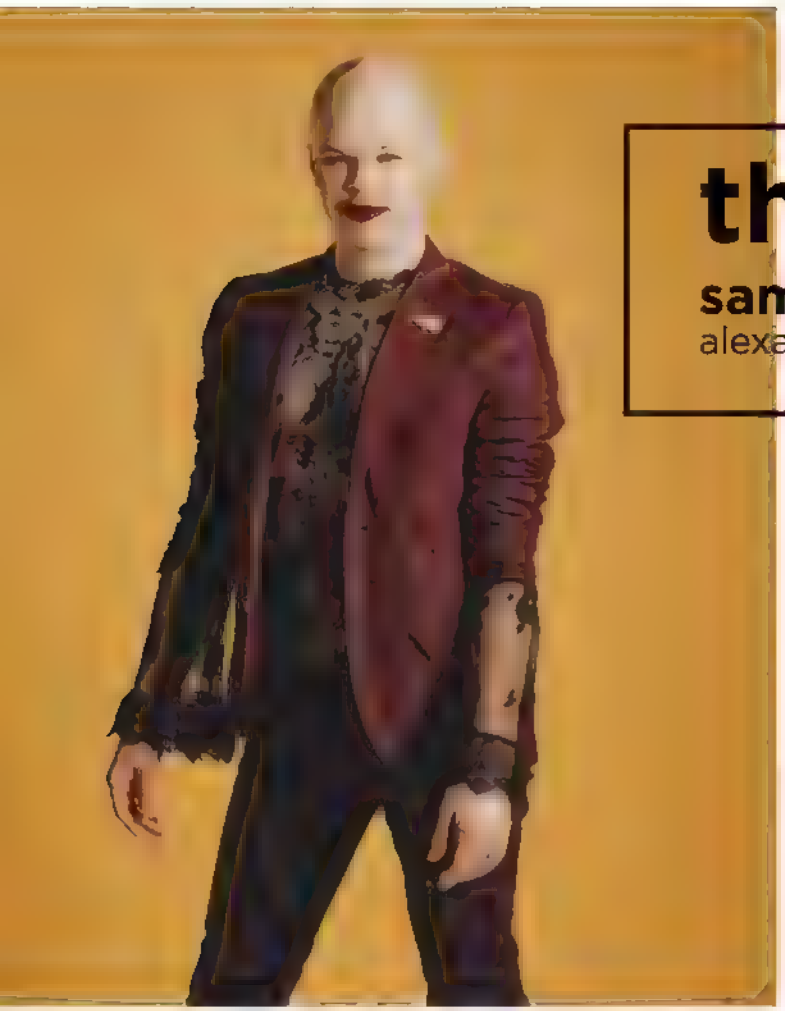
At the time of Littlejohn's letter, homosexuality was considered a "mental illness"; since then, the American Medical Association and other organizations have evolved. In its *Journal of Ethics*, the AMA has condemned conversion therapy as harmful and ineffective, claiming it leads to depression, anxiety and increased risk of suicidal ideation. Despite such cautionary assessments, an estimated 700,000 people in the United States have been subjected to the practice. Without decisive action, in the coming years thousands more LGBTQ youth will join the ranks of (often traumatized) conversion-therapy survivors.

To honor the decades of advocacy against conversion therapy, PLAYBOY partnered with the Trevor Project — a national LGBTQ youth suicide-prevention organization and architect of the "50 Bills 50 States" campaign to ban conversion therapy nationwide. On the following pages we spotlight and celebrate six activists and survivors who are raising awareness of its impact.

Their stories, each representative of a different experience with conversion therapy and presented alongside stunning portraits by queer photographer Ryan Pfluger, are a reminder of what Franklin E. Kameny, co-founder and president of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., wrote in PLAYBOY five decades ago. (His letter to the editor ran alongside Littlejohn's in response to April 1967 and August 1968 *Playboy Forum* comments made by behavioral researchers Gerald Davison and David Barlow, who believed it was possible to recondition "sexual deviation.") Kameny, whose organization was a branch of one of the first LGBTQ advocacy groups in the U.S., declared that homosexuality didn't need to be cured.

"Gay is good," he said.

These inspiring leaders are working to ensure society finally heeds that message.



the advocate

sam brinton

alexandria, virginia

Sam Brinton would be the first to admit they are an unlikely face of today's movement to ban conversion therapy. Brinton, who identifies as gender fluid and uses gender-neutral pronouns, received a master's degree in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2013 and started a nonprofit devoted to clean-energy advocacy soon after. "My technical passion is solving nuclear waste and disarming nuclear bombs," they say. "I've been doing it for more than a decade."

But two years before graduation, Brinton took on a very different kind of advocacy. As a conversion-therapy survivor, they began lobbying states to ban the practice, which was still legal in all 50 states in 2011. California became the first state to outlaw orientationchange efforts affecting LGBTQ youth the following year.

While advocates and survivors have been fighting against conversion therapy for decades — through litigation and storytelling, and by persuading major medical and mental health organizations to cease treating a person's sexual orientation or gender identity as a pathology — recent years have seen the practice achieve unprecedented levels of public attention and legislative progress. Today's advocacy landscape, Brinton notes, is practically unrecognizable in comparison with that of just eight years ago.

In 2019, the top Google search results for "conversion therapy" are resource guides and info sheets from LGBTQ organizations including the Trevor Project and Born Perfect, an initiative founded by the National Center for Lesbian Rights. But in 2011, Brinton says, the top 10 or 20 entries on Google were for conversion-therapy providers seeking patients. At the time, the LGBTQ movement was largely focused on marriage equality, so it was "hard to find anyone who would listen."

"Most people didn't think conversion therapy was still happening, and most people didn't think it was worthy of attention," Brinton explains, adding that advocacy efforts in 2011 focused on "trying to find someone who cared." But by 2017, the movement to ban conversion therapy had gained enough momentum that Brinton left nuclear engineering to work as the head of advocacy and government affairs for the Trevor Project. Advances since then have been significant. When Brinton brought the 50 Bills 50 States project to the LGBTQ youth organization two years ago, just five states — California, New Jersey, Oregon, Illinois and Vermont — had taken action to outlaw orientation-change efforts. Four states moved to ban conversion therapy in 2017, and five followed suit in 2018.

At press time, two states — New York and Massachusetts — had taken action this year to protect LGBTQ youth from "gay cure" treatments, and two more may soon join them. Colorado, led by Jared Polis, the country's first openly gay governor, is expected to enact a ban this year, and Maine governor Janet Mills has pledged her support for a conversion-therapy ban should legislation reach her desk.

Brinton credits that progress to the tireless advocacy of conversion-therapy survivors. But according to Brinton, misconceptions about the treatment persist.

"So many people think that because this is being done by a licensed therapist, it's effective and it works," they say. "Every major medical association and organization has come out against conversion therapy, and yet there's this pervasive idea that because the person who is doing it has the word doctor before their name, this must be good."

Brinton, who was subjected to shock therapy at the age of 11, won't be satisfied until conversion therapy is treated the same as smoking. "The Surgeon General has a warning on every pack of cigarettes," they say. "I want every single person across the country to know how bad conversion therapy is for their health."

In the meantime, Brinton keeps, above their desk, a memento of how far the movement has come. In 2015, when President Barack Obama came out against conversion therapy, it was reported above the fold of *The New York Times* — marking the first time a sitting president condemned the practice. Since then, Brinton has begun collecting pens from all the governors — seven Republicans and nine Democrats—who have signed conversion-therapy bans.

Brinton is hoping to add 34 more someday. If the past eight years are any indication, it may be sooner than anyone could have imagined.

the celebrity

dusty ray bottoms

new york, new york

Dusty Ray Bottoms prayed for a change. He just didn't know what needed to change. He was 20 years old and home on spring break from Wright State, a small university outside Dayton, Ohio built on land donated by the nearby Air Force base. Bottoms didn't fit in with his classmates in the theater program, and his home life wasn't any easier. The son and grandson of evangelical pastors, he grew up in what he calls a "conservative, God- fearing household."

Bottoms was essentially living three lives. There was the person his parents wanted him to be, the person his peers wanted him to be, and the hollow space where he hoped to one day carve out his own identity. He cried out to God to come and fill the space. "I can't do this anymore," he said. "I need something to happen."

The very next morning Bottoms got his wish. His mother called him down to the kitchen, saying his father had discovered something on his computer. To this day, he still doesn't know what it was his father found, but as he crossed the threshold into the living room, he already knew what they were about to say. Bottoms came out to them, the private longings and fears left unspoken for years suddenly pouring out like shattered glass.

"I was so terrified they were going to disown me and kick me out, but they did quite the opposite," he recalls. "They wanted to do anything they could to fix me. I was so depressed at the time that I would try anything to feel happy or to feel better."

At his parents' request, Bottoms agreed to be exorcised. At the age of 12, he had been sexually assaulted by a man who had pulled him underneath the stall in a mall bathroom. Although he'd lied and said he got away before the man hurt him, his parents remained convinced that he was "possessed by a gay demon." The church he grew up in taught that "if you have a sexual encounter with someone, you take on that person's spirit," he explains.

Bottoms compares his exorcism to a trip to the principal's office. The two-hour session was held in a conference room at a local church, where he was given a series of rules to follow. The facilitator, whom Bottoms calls a "prayer warrior," ordered him to keep both feet planted firmly on the floor and put his hands on the table in the center of the room, palms facing up. Bottoms was instructed to maintain eye contact with the prayer warrior at all times and keep his mouth wide open so the demons could be released. Three people held him in place while his parents looked on — his father scarlet-faced, his mother crying.

"I had to list the names of all the people I ever had a sexual encounter with," he says. "I was nervous, so I made up names. They tried to get me to speak in tongues. I just remember the prayer warrior would tell me to say 'Hallelujah!' over and over and over and over again, really fast, and the tongues would come."

This isn't the first time Bottoms has told this story. He moved to New York City to pursue acting in 2010 and began doing drag after seeing performances by local artists Bob the Drag Queen and Thorgy Thor. Their shows gave him permission to be "different, weird and unique," he says. His stage name is a combination of his childhood nickname, Dusty Ray, and a playful taunt from fellow waiters at a serving job in the city. After performing for nearly a decade in New York bars and nightclubs, last year Bottoms competed on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, on which he opened up publicly for the first time about surviving conversion therapy.

Bottoms came out as a survivor because he hoped it would help others who had endured similar circumstances feel less alone. But now he just wants to prove he was never broken, never needed fixing in the first place. After the exorcism, he was forced to meet with church leaders for a series of exit interviews, and during the third and final session a pastor warned him against continuing down the path of a "homosexual lifestyle."

"You will never find true love," he recalls the man saying. "You will never find success. You will just have a life of misery."

Today Bottoms knows that isn't true. The popularity of *RuPaul's Drag Race* has given him a global fan base. He has starred in national ad campaigns. His one-woman show, *It's a Hard Dot Life*, is set to tour the United States. He's engaged to his partner of six years. "Everything they said I couldn't have," he says, "I have."

the survivor

peter nunn

norcross, georgia

When Peter Nunn was 15 years old, his parents told him he was going on a trip. What he didn't know was that they'd found a men's workout magazine he'd tucked away. At the time, Nunn didn't understand what he was feeling or what it meant to be gay. Homeschooled throughout his childhood, he was raised in a repressive fundamentalist faith that he compares to a cult. "Every aspect of your life was controlled," he says. Transgressing those strict dictates meant risking excommunication, both from the church and the entire community.

During a layover at the airport, his father explained that Nunn was headed to a "therapy center" where counselors were going to "fix" him. If Nunn didn't change, he says, his family planned to "get rid" of him.

"I wasn't prepared for this. I'd been a pretty happy kid, but really quickly — just in that one conversation — I realized everything was on the line for me: my family, my relationship with my parents, my security of having a home, but also my faith and my God were at risk. If I didn't get this fixed, then everything that was important to me in my life could be taken away."

Nunn spent two weeks receiving conversion-therapy treatment at a center in Sioux City, Iowa. He says the building looked like a small office complex that might have been built in the 1970s — a series of sparsely furnished rooms with chairs and desks filling the space as an afterthought. During sessions, counselors told him, he recalls, that "homosexuality is a sin, that God punishes gay people with AIDS, and that there's no way to be in a happy gay relationship." If he continued acting on his attraction to men, they warned, he would die alone.

Although Nunn wanted to change, these sessions weren't the cure his parents had prayed for. Instead, he was left with depression and shame. At the age of 16, he attempted to take his own life.

Nunn survived that attempt, and he has continued surviving. In his early 20s, at the urging of a friend, he began seeing a psychologist, who helped him cope with the trauma he'd experienced. Even as he began dating men and slowly opening up to friends about his sexuality, the lessons he learned in conversion therapy festered.

"I didn't feel loved by my family, my friends or my God," he says.

Therapy helped him embrace the parts of himself he'd been taught to hate, but it also showed him that talking about his trauma could be transformative — both for himself and his community. In March, he testified in favor of House Bill 580, which seeks to ban conversion therapy in the state of Georgia. If the bill becomes law, therapists in the Peach State will be subject to "discipline by the appropriate licensing authority" if they're caught offering any treatment that seeks to "cure" the sexual orientation or gender identity of anyone under the age of 18.

By talking about his experiences, Nunn hopes to help ensure other LGBTQ youth don't have to suffer the hardships he did.

"If I can give hope to a kid or educate a parent who might not understand how dangerous this practice is and might reconsider sending their kid to conversion therapy," he says, "then it will have been worth it."

the therapist

ralph bruneau

los angeles, california

In many ways, Ralph Bruneau has been there from the beginning. When former California state senator Ted Lieu — now a U.S. representative — sought to introduce legislation banning conversion therapy in 2012, Equality California called Bruneau, a marriage and family therapist based in Los Angeles, to help craft the language. At the time, Bruneau was on the board of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, where he played a part in creating a certification process for LGBTQ-affirmative therapists.

As a gay man himself, Bruneau says, he leaped at the chance to help set a precedent for other states to pass legislation banning conversion therapy for LGBTQ youth.

"I don't think there's anybody in our LGBTQ world who doesn't carry around injury and shame, whether they've been through conversion therapy or not," says Bruneau, who specializes in trauma relief for both gay and straight patients. "It's so pernicious and so pervasive that it haunts us through our lives. Conversion therapy is ground zero for that."

Bruneau knows the weight of shame and how difficult it is to unload. He moved to New York City to pursue acting during the time of "free love" in the 1970s, when it felt as though "sex happened almost everywhere." He struggled to reconcile the radical sexual liberation he experienced in the West Village with the nagging idea that maybe, just maybe, he could be straight if he tried hard enough. He attended group sessions at a Scientology center in Manhattan and attempted a practice known as aesthetic realism, which sought to balance an individual's feminine and masculine energies.

Bruneau didn't change, but the world around him did. When the HIV/AIDS epidemic swept through New York in the 1980s, he watched as his theater community was hit hard. Two men with whom he had long-term relationships both died. After he began volunteering at a hospice in the city, he quit acting to pursue his master's (and later his Ph.D.) in clinical psychology.

"Every resource we had was being used to care for our loved ones, and I wanted to redirect my life in that direction," he says. "I've been doing that ever since."

His work as a clinician led him, eight years ago, to advocate against conversion therapy, and eventually Bruneau found an unexpected platform to raise awareness about the practice's harms. In 2017 he competed in International Mr. Leather, an annual contest held in Chicago that's best described as Miss America meets Tom of Finland. Bruneau's speech was about his "journey out of shame."

"I had tried everything, and the thing that worked was to accept that I'm born perfect," he now says.

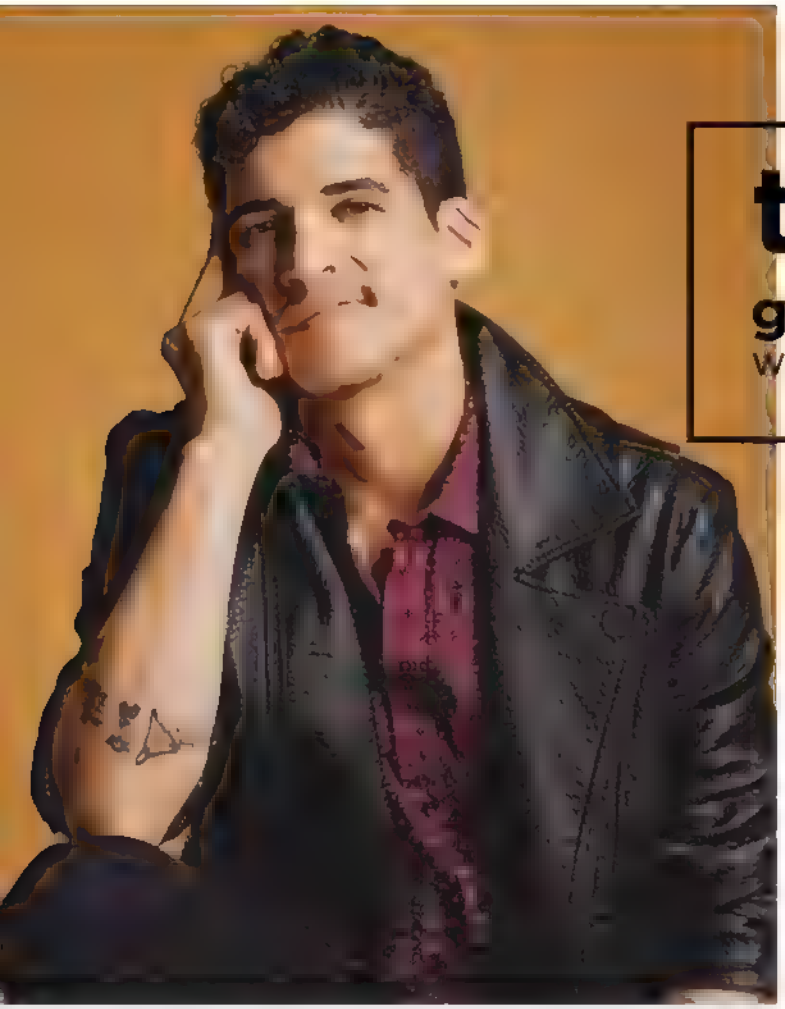
Bruneau won the title, which made him the oldest IML winner in history. A friend often jokes that his victory was historic for another reason: "Nobody else ever won IML with a 'save the children' speech," Bruneau says.

Bruneau spent the greater part of the following year traveling the world to represent IML. During his travels he raised funds for a National Center for Lesbian Rights campaign to ban conversion therapy. His goal was to raise "enough money to hire one staff member for one year." He says he came close. According to

Bruneau, most people he discussed the issue with weren't even aware that orientation-change efforts were still legal in their country. At the national level, as few as three countries have outlawed conversion therapy.

Bruneau believes it's his duty to use his platform, his profession and his expertise to fight for LGBTQ youth. He hopes others will join him.

"Those of us who've dealt with shame our whole lives," he says, "have an obligation to do what we can to make sure other generations of kids don't feel the shame we felt."



the faithful

gaby garcia-vera

washington, d.c.

"Did you hear?" Gaby Garcia-Vera asked his friends and family. "Isn't this so amazing?"

It was March 27, 2019, and Puerto Rico governor Ricardo Rosselló had just signed an executive order protecting minors from the practice of conversion therapy. Although the order doesn't outright ban the practice in the U.S. commonwealth, it does call on Puerto Rico's health officials to take action, within 90 days, against therapy that promotes efforts to change sexual orientation.

From Washington, D.C., Garcia-Vera dialed everyone he knew who still lived on the island — his birthplace and home until the age of 18. A year and a half after Hurricane Maria left Puerto Rico with a death toll in the thousands, and thousands more without clean water or electricity, Garcia-Vera felt irrepressible joy that his community had something to celebrate.

"In the midst of all the horrible things that have happened, it made me proud to be Puerto Rican," he tells PLAYBOY. "It was affirming. It made me feel seen."

Garcia-Vera is among the 70 percent of Puerto Ricans who identify as Catholic. At the age of 11, he shared his sexual orientation for the first time — "I was part of one of the first generations of folks who came out really, really young," he says. Some people in his personal life told him that those like him were "inherently bad." There was something inside them that "needed to get fixed to be right with God."

Garcia-Vera isn't a survivor of conversion therapy, but after joining the Trevor Project's youth advisory council in 2011, he began meeting LGBTQ youth who had been forced to attend camps that promised to pray the gay away. He understood the trauma they experienced.

"I know the warm wash of being and feeling alone," he says. "I know what it feels like for someone to single you out because of who you love. It is one of the most difficult things to overcome."

Many practitioners of conversion therapy invoke scripture to legitimize their work. But Garcia-Vera's Catholicism is precisely what feeds his passion to end the practice nationwide. Feeling shunned by a religious tradition that, he was told, viewed him as the living embodiment of sin, he left the Catholic Church as a teenager. It wasn't until his mid-20s, as he questioned whether condemnation could truly represent God's feelings toward LGBTQ people, that Garcia-Vera began to reconcile his faith with his sexual orientation.

"If we're all made in God's image, then you're perfect the way you are — with all your imperfections," he says. "Loving someone else inherently can't be something that is imperfect."

Today, Garcia-Vera works for a nonpartisan Catholic advocacy group in the nation's capital. In his efforts to ban conversion therapy, he continues to see how morality can be "weaponized" against the LGBTQ community. While talking to a conservative politician in Florida who supported a bill that would allow adoption agencies to discriminate against same-sex couples, for example, Garcia-Vera says the lawmaker asserted that homosexuality is a personal choice.

Catholicism is showing some signs of evolution. In a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, seven out of 10 Catholics in the U.S. agreed that society should accept homosexuality, compared with 66 percent of mainline Protestants and 36 percent of evangelical Protestants. Though Pope Francis has been lauded for his more moderate views on homosexuality, he seemingly endorsed conversion therapy as recently as August 2018, saying that "a lot can be done through psychiatry." The Vatican backtracked on those remarks, but the pontiff outlined a similar sentiment in April, when he advised parents of LGBTQ youth to "please consult and go to a professional" if they are "seeing rare things" in their children.

As Catholic leaders and conservative lawmakers refuse to modernize their views, Garcia-Vera remains optimistic that one day our leaders, both elected and religious, will realize the responsibility they have to those "they represent — to both do better and be better."

"Who and how we love isn't something that is up for question," he says. "We know exactly who we are. We deserve better."

Veronica Kennedy remembers exactly where she was when she found out Matthew Shepard had been murdered. Then just 18, Kennedy was living with her parents while she attended Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale. She had come home between classes to eat lunch and furiously type up a paper she'd waited until the last minute to start writing. Her family had a television in the basement, and when she looked up, she saw Shepard's face. He was killed in October 1998 by two men, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, who beat him and left him tied to a fence to die.

Kennedy didn't know him as Matthew Shepard. She knew him as Matt, a theater nerd with a "goose-honk laugh" who frequently showed up to class with a rumpled shirt when he missed laundry day on Mondays. The two had attended the American School in Switzerland, where their classmates included the "children of civil servants and military brats, along with Saudi princes, celebrities' kids and rich businessmen's children." They were dorm mates and had German class together

Kennedy, who was just entering her freshman year when Shepard was a senior, is still reluctant to discuss his death. She describes the horror of seeing him become a national symbol of anti-gay hate crimes as the "end of innocence."

"I didn't talk about it for a long time, but what I did do was become very vocal as an advocate," she says. "I came out."

Kennedy describes herself as "bisexual, a polyglot and a giant nerd." But she is "a mother first and foremost," which she says gave her a new perspective on the violence and stigma LGBTQ people face just because of who they are. Around the time she gave birth to her son, Elias, and after meeting Sam Brinton and learning about the 50 Bills 50 States campaign, Kennedy began to research conversion therapy. As the mother of a little boy who is "black, Irish and Colombian," the prospect of anyone trying to force him to be someone he isn't horrifies her

"It's as ludicrous as me saying I'm going to change my kid from straight to gay," Kennedy says. "If Elias comes to me one day and says, 'Mom, I'm straight,' what am I going to do send him off to try and make him gay? How goofy does that sound?"

Her experience as both a mother and a teenage friend of Matthew Shepard has given her a unique voice with which to advocate against orientation change The only cisgender female member of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, she frequents gay bars in the metro area in gothic nun regalia to advocate for HIV AIDS awareness But Kennedy says her role in the drag activist troupe has evolved· She often broaches the subject of conversion therapy with the people she meets, many of whom are survivors

One interaction sticks out to her When she was five months pregnant, Kennedy rode with her fellow sisters in the 2015 Pride parade, the punishing humidity of summer in D.C. compounded by the group's signature costumery As they prepared to board the float, a drag queen approached her and noticed she was expecting. "Love that baby regardless of how he turns out," he told her. "I am who I am right now because I had to stand up for myself and my parents wouldn't."

The two never spoke again after that day, and Kennedy will probably never know exactly what that stranger went through But having witnessed the brutal cost of homophobia, she told the drag queen exactly what she would one day tell her son. "You are fantastic and you are beautiful," she said. "You are perfection, sweetheart."

the parent

veronica kennedy

annandale, virginia

JOKER

WITS AND GIGGLES

With Joker bringing an iconic grin back to theaters, we consider why the diabolical hedonist continues to captivate us — even if we never figure him out

BY **ANTHONY BREZNICAN**

It's the bared teeth. Slightly yellow but still gleaming between the candy-apple lips. Clenched and hungry. Ruthless. You wouldn't call the Joker's expression a smile — not unless you were kidding yourself.

There's agony in the villain's bloodthirsty grin. There's rage behind the eyes, battling against the pain for dominance. Maybe there's a smear of satisfaction — let's face it, the man loves his work — but he isn't necessarily happy. He's ferocious.

In the nearly eight decades since he began menacing the good people of Gotham City, the Joker has taken on many identities, worn many faces and had many names. Just like the devil himself.

Still, for all his varying origin stories, he's instantly recognizable, and not just for the green hair, pale skin and purple suits. All Jokers share an unrepentant delight in chaos for its own sake; their antics aim to torment the helpless and innocent, and they're always able to spring surprises on Batman, a hero who prides himself on preparing for the worst.

In its official character biography, DC Comics lists the Joker's defining power as "complete unpredictability." That aligns perfectly with his latest screen incarnation, which released on October 4. Joaquin Phoenix stars in the savage, heartbreaking R-rated character drama titled simply Joker. The film spirals into the ruined psychology of a man named Arthur Fleck, a wannabe stand-up comic who makes ends meet as a clown for hire on Gotham's mean streets. Crippling mental illness and a long history of abuse make it increasingly difficult for Fleck to deal with life's mounting indignities and defeats. He's a constant punch line, until the day he snaps and decides to hit back. But in true Joker fashion, each of the film's seeming revelations only raises more uncertainty about its main character.

"I really like the idea of something that challenges the audience," Phoenix tells PLAYBOY. "Every time I felt we were certain about what motivated his actions, I became less interested. We would constantly try to challenge ourselves while making it. There's not one moment, not one catalyst that creates this character. The pleasure for me in being part of it was not having the easy answers."

The Wayne family looms over the story, but there's no giant bat here; the Joker's nemesis is within. This is the DC Comics version of *Taxi Driver*, or *The King of Comedy* featuring Norman Bates instead of Rupert Pupkin. It's no coincidence that Robert De Niro turns up as a late-night talk-show host revered by the main character.

Arthur Fleck is a name comic book fans won't recognize, an original creation of director and co-writer Todd Phillips, the filmmaker behind the *Hangover* trilogy. Phillips acknowledges that he could have made the same movie about a struggling comedian who turns homicidal without any of the DC Comics framework. But what's the fun in that?

"There's a spirit in me, and I know it's in Joaquin, of taking something revered and fucking with it a little," Phillips says. "The comic-book movie world is this unstoppable machine, and this movie isn't going to stop it and probably won't change it. But to take it and turn it on its head a little? That's actually very Joker."

The film does honor one part of the Joker tradition. It clashes with everything that came before. "It's a great character for filmmakers, writers, comic book artists and actors to have fun with and play with, because there are no rules," Phillips says. "That's the point: What kind of rules are you going to break with the Joker?"

As the villain tells Batman in 1988's graphic novel *The Killing Joke*, written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Brian Bolland, "If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice! *Ha ha ha!*"

No one needs to hear Batman's origin story again. Schoolchildren can recite the details of Thomas and Martha Wayne's

ILLUSTRATION BY **BUTCHER BILLY**

alleyway death and young Bruce's vow for justice like the pledge of allegiance. The Joker, by contrast, has always been an enigma, a chameleon, a shape-shifter. Comic book scribes and moviemakers have outdone one another in recent decades, creating a panoply of alt-histories for this snickering trickster. None of the Joker backstories is more true or valid than any of the others, and that's how DC prefers to keep it.

"Like a lot of mysterious characters, he works because we don't know his origin and he's often portrayed as an unreliable narrator," says comics legend Jim Lee, DC's publisher and chief creative officer. "Even when he's telling you, 'This is how I came to be,' you don't know if it's the truth or not."

That became a defining part of director Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, in which Heath Ledger, in his Oscar-winning turn as the Joker, uses a ventriloquist-dummy voice to unspool conflicting tall tales about his ghastly facial scars. Tragic backstories can create empathy for a character, says screenwriter David S. Goyer, who has a "story by" credit on the 2008 box-office juggernaut. The filmmakers were more interested in arousing fear and anxiety, and nothing accomplishes that like someone lying to your face.

"We thought we shouldn't do an origin story," Goyer says. "We should just make him exist, and furthermore, we should make him slippery, with these sort of *Choose Your Own Adventure* origin stories When we first posed that to Warner Bros., even after the success of *Batman Begins*, they balked: 'How can you do that?' and 'Which one of these is true?' We said, 'You're never going to get the answer.' That's one of the reasons he was truly scary "

The Joker first appeared, without explanation, in the spring of 1940, cutting a path of murder, robbery and mayhem through Gotham City in Batman No. 1. The Caped Crusader himself had debuted less than a year earlier, as a masked vigilante in *Detective Comics No 27*. As the crime fighter's popularity

soared, the Joker became a way for creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger to pit their stoic, shadowy hero against a flamboyant, wisecracking foil. Even in their first clash, the Joker manages to draw out Bruce Wayne's sense of humor. "You may be the Joker, but I'm the king of clubs," Batman says, delivering a groaner of a dad joke with a right hook to the Joker's jaw.

We've all crossed paths with his type many times. The greater fear is becoming him.

Eleven years after the character's debut, Finger wrote a backstory in 1951's Detective Comics No. 168 that identifies the Joker as the Red Hood, a burglar in a tuxedo and a face-concealing crimson dome who is discolored and disfigured after plunging into a vat of chemicals during a failed heist. The Killing Joke expanded on Finger's story 37 years later by adding that the Joker had been a struggling stand-up comedian before he became the Red Hood out of financial desperation. The 2014–2015 comics series Batman: Endgame proposed an even more eccentric origin, implying that the Joker is a supernatural near-immortal who, like Stephen King's Pennywise in It, turns up throughout Gotham's grim history.

Some things stick, some don't.

"Whatever is embraced by fans and readers is what accumulates as canon," Lee says.

In 1989, Tim Burton's Batman created yet another new identity for the character, with Jack Nicholson playing mid-level gangster Jack Napier, the triggerman who murdered the Waynes during a mugging. There's no Red Hood, but the movie retains the notion that being mutilated in a chemical bath drove Napier to madness. From there, the cautious Napier becomes a wild man. He indulges. He takes what he wants. He destroys anyone in the way.

"That makes Jack Nicholson's Joker one of the stronger versions we have available," says University of California, Los Angeles clinical psychologist Andrea Letamendi, who explores the psychology behind superhero storytelling on the Arkham Sessions podcast. "This is his true nature, and he's found a way to express himself and actualize those inner feelings of chaos and destruction. He's enjoying his life so much."

The Joker's brazen lack of remorse is one source for the disturbing combination of attraction and repulsion that he inspires in us. "We don't feel safe around this person," Letamendi says. "Our natural inclination is to be fearful and avoid him. But that freedom and sense of enjoyment of his experience lures us in."

Call it toxic charisma. From Cesar Romero's amused, alliteration-spouting antagonist on the campy 1960s TV series to Mark Hamill's dastardly and dashing 1990s version on Batman: The Animated Series, one of the unifying Joker traits is magnetism.

"This is why Jared Leto fell flat for us," Letamendi says of the so-called Juggalo Joker from 2016's Suicide Squad. "The edginess went so far, but he didn't have the charm or appeal. He was supposed to be tatted up and cool, but that's different than genuine charm."

The Joker's flexibility has made him a nearly infinite resource for DC. "He can manifest himself in various forms because he's a modern-day boogeyman," Lee says. "He's beguiling in his own way because he's so over-the-top."

The company is so confident in the Joker's mainstream appeal that, in addition to the new film, it released three comic-book titles about him in October, each featuring a different mythology. Two of them — Kami Garcia's Joker/Harley: Criminal Sanity, and John Carpenter and Anthony Burch's The Joker: Year of the Villain — dropped on the same day, October 9, while Jeff Lemire's Joker: Killer Smile hit three weeks later.

Asked why he thinks the Joker provides such rich material for storytellers, Phoenix points to the malevolence in the clown's eyes.

"When you don't have a definitive, clear backstory, it allows us to project our ideas on it. And that engages us. The character forces us to examine ourselves and our behavior."

The actor grins, wide and sinister. "Also, son of a bitch — he just looks cool."

In that reading, the Joker remains fascinating not because he's aberrant but because he's a funhouse mirror. We've all crossed paths with his type many times. The greater fear is not becoming his victim but becoming him. In all his forms, the Joker is someone who has lost his humanity. He feels nothing except selfishness. He can only rid himself of hurt by inflicting it on others. We recognize the mercilessness. We know the narcissism. We sense the misery tearing him to pieces from within.

We could almost feel sorry for the Joker, if only he weren't laughing at us. ■

Dare to be
Different
Nia Nebula

Photography by **@blow.raw**
Nude Robe **Catherine D'Lish | @catherinedlish**
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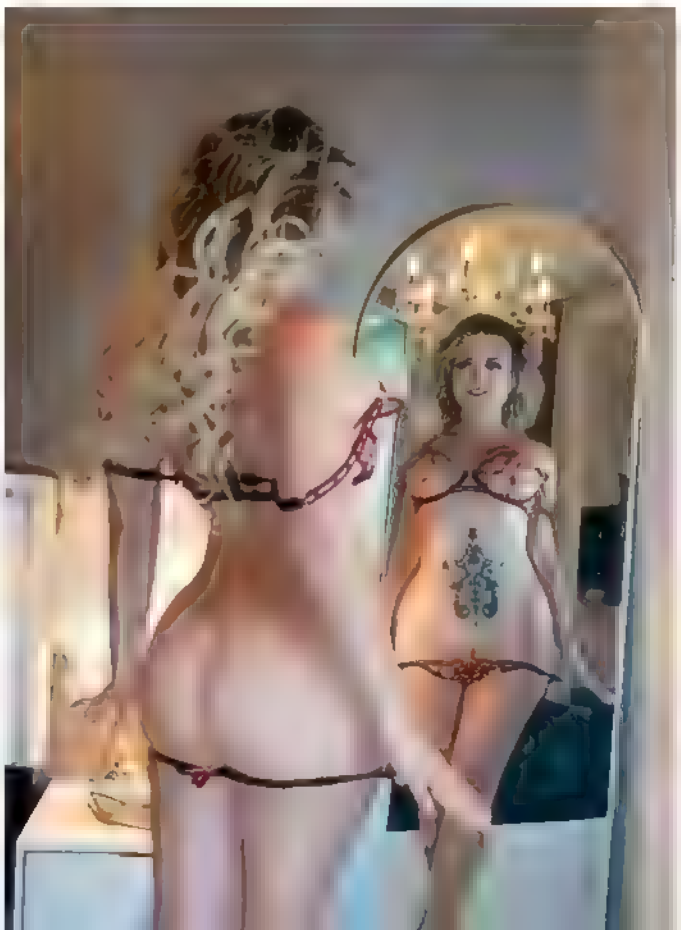
Honey Birdette | @honeybirdette



Can you give us a background on your career and where it all started? I went to college and specialized in geography and history which led to me working in the tourism sector of Vancouver, Canada for 3 years. The pay wasn't great and I had been supplementing my income with burlesque and other party gigs on weekends. My bestie at the time had been dancing on the Canadian showgirl circuit for over a year and my first booking ended up being in Kitimat, BC, just south of Alaska. In the last ten years, I have been graced with opportunities to perform on stages across Canada, Europe, Australia, and the US. I love everything that dancing has brought into my life.

What's one thing you've learned about yourself? I've learned to be resilient while also being patient with myself. I think the best thing you can do for yourself is enjoy your time while you're in it and have realistic goals set so you can keep moving forward.

What is the biggest misconception people have about you? People always assume I'm Canadian since that's where my career in this industry began, but I'm actually born and raised in Bulgaria and immigrated to Canada when I was 9. It's a big contributor to how I've been able to take my career to so many destinations! Do you have any hidden talents, if so what is it? I'm a fantastic cook, but you need an invite to my house first before you find out.

How do you prepare mentally and physically for a big photoshoot or event? Get as much sleep beforehand knowing that most events are multiple nights long.

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? Long baths with salt soak.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? I had a fan shove my foot almost fully into his mouth and smile at me like a toad that has just caught a fly, during a VIP champagne room. He was nice enough to tip exxxtra for not giving me a heads-up.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? A solar-powered vibrator preferably a womanizer brand.

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? Caviar and champagne.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words or advice for our readers? Go support sexy artists! Giving money to beautiful ladies is a fantastic dopamine hit.

PLAYBOY

HE RIT AG E

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA • KINUKO Y. CRAFT • THOMAS PAGE MCBEE • A PRO-CHOICE PL ATFORM • THE NAKED TRUTH: NUDE DUDES IN PLAYBOY

APOCALYPSE THEN

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE MEMORABLE PLAYMATE SCENE FROM FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA'S OSCAR-WINNING 1979 CLASSIC

BY STEVE PALOPOLI

On the great and sprawling road map of American culture, the distance between PLAYBOY magazine and Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece *Apocalypse Now* is, surprisingly, just a short jaunt — perhaps one best traversed by helicopter.

Among the movie's many indelible scenes is a five-minute sequence, possibly inspired by actual events, in which Playmates put on a show for servicemen — or try to. Against the *chugga-chugga* thump of whirring blades, a Rabbit Head–emblazoned chopper descends from the night sky onto a brightly lit stage as hundreds of G.I.s scream in anticipation. An unfazed Captain Willard (Martin Sheen), leading his soldiers upriver to hunt the renegade Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) when they unexpectedly encounter the USO show emceed by Bill Graham, joins the audience. As three Playmates — portrayed by Colleen Camp and real-life Centerfolds Cyndi Wood (1974 Playmate of the Year) and Linda Carpenter (August 1976, as Linda Beatty) — emerge from the helicopter and begin shimmying to "Suzie Q," the crowd grows frenzied. Soon enough, the soldiers rush the platform, forcing the performers to depart. Like the movie as a whole, the scene brilliantly captures a frightening aspect of humanity: the menace of men driven to extremes.

"IT WAS ALL, I'M SURE, VERY DANGEROUS, BUT THROUGHOUT THE SHOOTING WE DIDN'T LOSE ONE PERSON. SO MANY THINGS CAN GO WRONG."

Previous page: *In the film, February 1973 Playmate and PMOY 1974 Cynda Wood takes on a role close to her heart — Playmate of the Year. She recalls that during her downtime on the set, and even in the midst of a typhoon, she liked to write original songs.* ***Above:*** *A scene featuring Colleen Camp that built on her real-life experience as a bird trainer was filmed but later cut from the original release; part of it can be seen in Apocalypse Now: Redux.* ***Right:*** *Camp (top left), Linda Carpenter (top right) and Wood atop a helicopter bearing the Rabbit Head insignia.*

In 1974, when Coppola started to consider directing Apocalypse Now, pretty much everyone around him thought it was a bad idea. As proven by Coppola's previous critical and box office successes *The Godfather, The Godfather Part II* and *The Conversation* gangsters, gritty realism and paranoia were the currency of New Hollywood. War movies were hopelessly uncool, especially ones about Vietnam, from which the U.S. had just withdrawn. But Coppola decided to take on the project and headed into the jungles of the Philippines — then under martial law and in the middle of a bloody civil conflict — where he turned a 1969 script by John Milius into a hallucinogenic antiwar epic. Despite legendary delays, when the film debuted in 1979 it won the Cannes Film Festival's highest honor and was nominated for eight Oscars, winning for cinematography and sound.

The movie has more than endured; it has evolved. In 2001 an expanded re-edit, *Apocalypse Now Redux*, restored 49 minutes to the film, including an additional Playmate story line involving helicopter fuel (as well as a brief connecting scene in which Willard's crew members talk about a U.S. soldier so obsessed with his PLAYBOY's that he kills a South Vietnamese officer who damages one). Kim Aubry, a producer on *Redux*, found inspiration in the original Playmate segment. "The USO scene was one of the realest moments I'd ever seen in cinema. There was something about it that felt almost like a documentary and yet surreal at the same time," he says. "It's so incredibly powerful and political."

Indeed, it's that kind of reaction that has contributed to the film's remarkable staying power. This year Coppola will release what he considers the definitive director's version, *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut*, which will of course include the iconic USO scene. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the original release, we present the never-before-told oral history of how the Playmate scenes came to be, as related by those who were involved.

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Unexpected disasters delayed but never derailed the ambitious production

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA, director: I remember looking at the USO set with the head of the art department and saying, "I made a big mistake. As they approach from the river, they ought to see a glimpse of this place." We had built the set really far off the river, and you had to drive for a while. From a dramatic standpoint it would have been better if, when they're in the boat, they look and say, "What the hell is that?" He said, "Well, we put it in the wrong place." I said, "Yeah, but we'll make it work." And that's when we were hit by the typhoon that destroyed everything.

CYNDI WOOD, actress and 1974 PMOY: Every time they'd plan to do our scene, something would happen. On one trip, the day I arrived, Marty Sheen had a heart attack, so they shut down production for six weeks. Another time, I arrived just in time for what was probably the largest typhoon of the decade. All of a sudden, without warning, everybody's running, shouting "Take cover! Take cover!" and this typhoon comes raging through. We were trapped in an abandoned building in the jungle, far away from the set and the rest of the crew, with no way to communicate, no telephones. It was so loud. Here I am, 25 and pretty innocent, and all these grown men around me were scared to death that everybody was going to die.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: We had to stop shooting for three or four weeks. It was a major event, it destroyed the USO set, and we had to rebuild it. So I said, "Well, this time let's rebuild it right on the river so that we can correct the mistake we made." And they did.

ROLE PLAYING

Some parts were filled by eager actors (with one photographer determined to document the production); others took time and effort to cast

CYNDI WOOD: I didn't go looking for the part. I believe they called me in. I didn't have to audition. I was involved, believe it or not, for four years on that film — though I wasn't there all the time.

COLLEEN CAMP, actress: I had done a movie called Smile, which was filmed in the Bay Area and Santa Rosa. Fred Roos, coproducer of *Apocalypse Now*, came to visit that location in 1975, and I met him there. Fast-forward to when he was casting *Apocalypse Now*. I met with Fred, Francis and producer Gray Frederickson, and at first I did not want to do any nudity. But Cyndi Wood, who was Playmate of the Year, was a very close friend of mine.

NANCY MORAN, on-set photographer: I was a freelance photographer in Vietnam in the early 1970s. Gloria Emerson was a wonderful reporter for *The New York Times*, and I took pictures for many of her Vietnam stories. We worked together a lot. She was very critical of my going [to the *Apocalypse Now* set in the Philippines], she thought it was too soon to make a movie like that, because it would take away from the war in a way. That kind of feeling was going around. I mean, it was very soon after the war ended.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: One of the Playmates we had cast before the place was wrecked by the storm was Lynda Carter — who, when we were able to start again three weeks later, couldn't come back because she had just been cast as Wonder Woman. So we cast Colleen Camp. We had Cyndi Wood, Colleen Camp and Linda Carpenter — all beautiful, very nice young women — and they worked with the choreographer to work out a little routine.

COLLEEN CAMP: One night I went to the Palm Restaurant on Santa Monica Boulevard with Fred Roos and Cyndi Wood. At that dinner, Fred and Cyndi convinced me I should replace Lynda Carter and rethink the nudity — which I did. So I got cast.

NANCY MORAN: Every day I called the publicity department at United Artists [the U.S. distributor for *Apocalypse Now*] and asked, "Do you want to hire me to go out there?" Finally they did. They wanted someone who'd actually been in Vietnam. I stayed in the Philippines for almost two months in 1976.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: We had to find many, many young men who could look like G.I.s, and we were of course in a place where there were few. We did a lot of work to locate army installations and educational institutions. That was a big and difficult effort. [For the role of the MC] I was fortunate to have a friend, Bill Graham — rest in peace — who was a famous rock promoter but always wanted to be an actor ever since he was a kid and first saw John Garfield in a movie. He was a remarkably wonderful person, Bill Graham.

COLLEEN CAMP: When I went to the Philippines in November 1976, it changed my life. I was 23 years old. It's martial law; there's 400 men and three women. The sequence that we filmed was unbelievable.

THE ALL-NIGHTER

The Playmate USO scene was shot in one single marathon night of filmmaking that included a variety of challenges

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: We knew that it was meant to be an incredible contradiction — which was not untrue — where the Americans had sort of brought their whole culture into this ancient, primeval jungle. So that was the fun of it, as it were. And of course

the challenge was that this unlikely show-business show should be deposited right there in the midst of antiquity. Obviously it was night, so the photographer had to figure out how the hell he would see it. He came up with this concept of these almost rafts with banks of lights on them, which were there to illuminate the scene.

COLLEEN CAMP: Our call time was about two in the afternoon, and we shot till about six in the morning. It was amazing. Here we are, in the middle of the Philippines. We had to be really careful because of the helicopter blades, and the pilots were 18, 19 years old — they were very young. I remember we had to get out of the helicopter onto that little tiny strip and just start dancing.

CYNDI WOOD: That little routine was nothing, but we shot for 16 hours straight and had to do it over and over again. They had to get different angles, and they shot the audience, and they did this and that. I collapsed on the stage from exhaustion. I've never been that tired in my life. They brought in a doctor, and he gave me a couple of B12 injections. That was kind of intense.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Supplying the people, and their safety, food and bathroom facilities, was in itself a major operation. Once we had it all together, we just shot through the night. The reason it took so many hours to shoot was it involved difficult stunts — when the helicopter flies up and there are still guys hanging on to it and they drop into the water.

It was all, I'm sure, very dangerous, but throughout the shooting, we did not lose one person in the entire year and a half, two years. As a director working on a play or a movie, that's the greatest fear you have, because the people working so hard and so many hours have their minds on what they're doing and not on their own safety. You're constantly emphasizing safety, and so many things can go wrong.

NANCY MORAN: It was a long night, and I remember thinking it was amazing that they could do all this at once. It was so much work, but it was a very funny scene — here's this boat going downriver, and all of a sudden they come across these Playmates. It's just a wonderful, surreal idea.

Colleen had a wonderful sense of humor on the set. Cyndi's the only one who could dance, but that adds to the goofy charm of the whole thing, I think. The guys were supposed to go nuts, which is absolutely believable, and start leaping onto the stage. But it's like — and this is one of the things about the movie — how much control do you have over hundreds of extras? If I had been Colleen or Cyndi or Linda, I think it would have been scary to have all these guys come jumping out.

COLLEEN CAMP: When the G.I.s started to rush the stage, it was actually scary. It was very quick — the girls get scared, they have to get back into the helicopter, and they're hurried off the stage. But it was actually planned out really well, so we weren't in any danger — except that, you know, helicopters are extremely dangerous.

CYNDI WOOD: When they rushed the stage, I don't remember being aware that that was going to happen. Francis did that a lot — you wouldn't know what was going to take place, so you would react naturally. He was an incredible director.

THE REAL VIETNAM PLAYMATE

Playboy lore has it that the USO scene was inspired by Playmate Jo Collins's much more practical 1966 trip to Vietnam

GARY COLE, former PLAYBOY photography director, who oversaw the magazine's 1979 *Apocalypse Finally* pictorial: Back in those days, before a Playmate could appear in a film, Playboy had to approve the filmmaker or approve the script or something, because they didn't want the girls appearing in porno or really crap movies if it could be helped. Obviously, because Coppola was involved, I think we skipped that step.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Everyone hassled us, from the Department of Defense on. Playboy could have easily said, "We do not want you to depict the Playboy logo on that helicopter." They could have done anything they wanted; it was their imagery. But they basically left us alone, and I was always very appreciative.

ELIZABETH NORRIS, former PLAYBOY senior director of public relations: In the 1960s, a lifetime subscription was deliverable by a Playmate. During the Vietnam war, a group of guys in the 173rd Airborne Brigade pooled their money, and one of them, Jack Price, ordered a lifetime subscription. They wanted a Playmate to deliver it, which was part of the deal. Long story short, 1965 Playmate of the Year Jo Collins went to the hospital in Vietnam where these men were and met them.

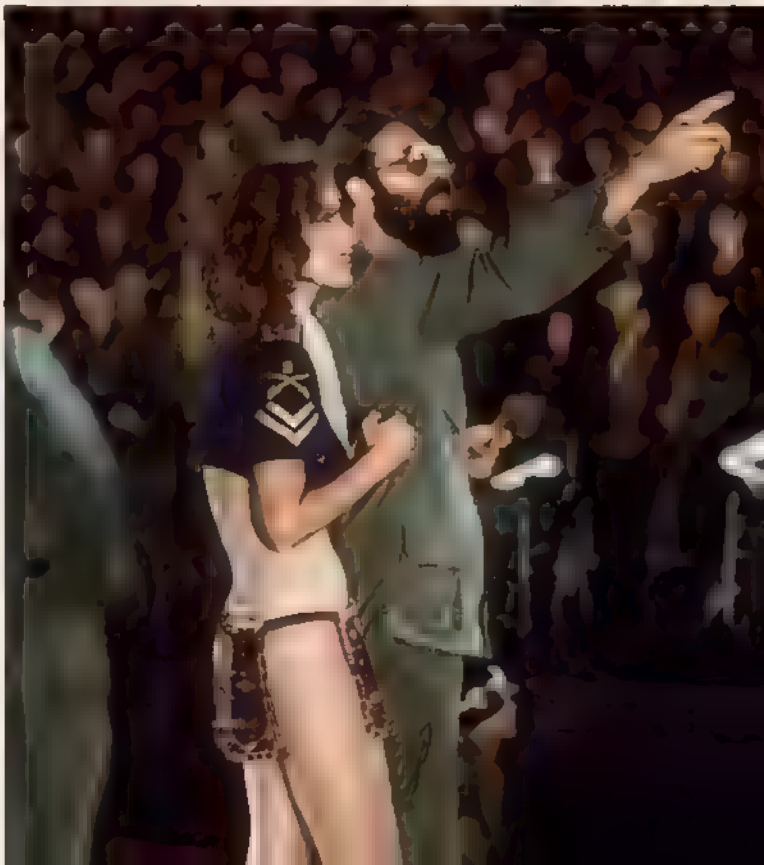
JO COLLINS, December 1964 Playmate and 1965 PMOY: I didn't even know where Vietnam was. I thought I was going to Europe. I had no clue. Never in a million years did I think it was going to turn out the way it did.

GARY COLE: People would say, "Oh, Playboy sent Playmates over there." Well, Jo Collins is the Playmate we sent to Vietnam who actually visited with the troops. No girls ever went over there and jumped out of a helicopter and did a go-go dance or anything like that.

JO COLLINS: When I was in Vietnam in 1966, we were in areas that were literally being bombed. We could have been blown up at any time. Scary, exciting... it was all those things. I visited as many bases and medical field centers as they allowed. I wish I could have worn attractive outfits, like the miniskirts and go-go boots [the Playmates wear in the movie].

ELIZABETH NORRIS: We have always thought Jo's Vietnam trip was the basis for that scene. However, that has never been substantiated.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: The original script, and that scene, were the work of John Milius... he's the one who was really the genius behind *Apocalypse Now*, in my opinion. I know he was well aware that there were Playboy Playmates in Vietnam. I did not know of it. I didn't base it on that; I based it on what was in the original script, which might have been inspired by that.



***Far left:** Director Francis Ford Coppola speaks with Camp behind the scenes with Wood in the background. **Left:** Wood says that as the helicopter stunt was being filmed, she wasn't sure whether the G.I.s hanging from the landing skid were stuntmen or not. "Some of those things you just didn't know, because they were so spontaneous." **Top right:** As the challenging production went on, Coppola saw the movie's budget balloon from $12 million to nearly three times that. **Bottom right:** Carpenter and Coppola on set.*

Linda Carpenter, the real-life August 1976 Playmate, plays a fictional Miss August in Apocalypse Now. To fill the crowd with hundreds of G.I. look-alikes, the crew sought out extras at military and educational institutions in the Philippines.

LOST AND FOUND LEGACIES

Across the film's several iterations, the core Playmate scene has remained intact

COLLEEN CAMP: In the John Milius script there was a scene that set up the girls losing the helicopter fuel with Bill Graham, and then they trade for fuel to get out. Those scenes were crucial to the subsequent scene. But the day I arrived in March 1977, Martin Sheen had a heart attack, so the scenes we were shooting never had a setup. Francis Coppola, in improvisational mode, said, "Tell me a little bit about yourself," and I said, "Well, I used to be a bird trainer at Busch Gardens." He decided to write a whole scene of me and birds in the helicopter, and a piece of it was shown in *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: During the first typhoon, I didn't want to stop shooting, because I have always felt that if you get bad weather, that's an opportunity to have something really extraordinary. You might as well shoot. So we all went during the typhoon, and the crew tried to put the set back together. The rain was coming down unbelievably. That's when we shot the scene where they go to the medevac camp, which was in the typhoon. And that was put back in the *Redux* version.

KIM AUBRY, *Redux* co-producer: Obviously those [fuel-related] scenes were intended to be in the film. The 1979 released version has some strange gaps where, for length and other reasons, scenes were removed, and there are certain continuity things that you don't quite get unless you see these added scenes.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Since I had these three women, and they were all uniquely talented and had their own stories, I shot three additional sequences in this scene — which would now be extremely bad in the #MeToo movement — where Bill Graham sort of trades the girl for fuel. This is not something that would go over very well in today's political climate. The point I was trying to make was that in a way the abuse of sending a 17-year-old boy to Vietnam to drop napalm on people is as immoral as what is done to these young, beautiful girls at 17. That was a symbol of abuse — what we do to the young men, we also do to the young girls in our so-called civilization.

COLLEEN CAMP: When the movie came out, initially I was upset. All my scenes were cut because we weren't able to shoot a scene to set them up. At the end of the day, it was a lesson. You can't control things. It was a very important thing to learn, and I was lucky to learn it at that age.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: Tribeca is going to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the movie, and they said to me, "Which version do you want to show, the original 1979 version or the much longer *Redux* version?" The 1979 version was very abruptly cut to be short, because at the time the movie came out, no one knew what its fate was going to be. A lot of people said it was too long and too weird. I didn't really like the original version, but I also felt the *Redux* version was too long. So I said, "What I'd really like to do now is what I think is the best version — what I would say is Francis's version, the one I prefer." And that ultimately got done, and I am very pleased with it. What's available in 2019 for color and sound is so beyond what it was when we first made the movie that it looks and sounds unbelievable. *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut* has the Playmate show, of course, but it does not have the medevac scene.

CYNDI WOOD: Working on the film was truly an incredible experience, scary as it was. We were in a solid concrete building with no glass in the windows when the biggest typhoon hit. It was so loud, it was deafening, like at any moment the whole building would cave in. This is going to sound weird, but I've never felt more alive in my whole life. ■

HERITAGE SPOTLIGHT

A KALEIDOSCOPIC TALENT

[illegible] ingenuity [illegible] TREOY [illegible] decade

BY CAT AUER

One day in 1974, Kinuko Yamabe Craft handdelivered to Playboy's Chicago office a set of paintings she'd been commissioned to create for the magazine. Designed to accompany a "ribald classic," Craft's elaborate wood-panel triptych (right) and two additional works were so skillfully done, from the intricate medieval Russian iconography to the faux-distressed gold-leaf frames, that they looked as if they'd been lifted from the walls of a museum.

Stunned, associate art director Kerig Pope dropped to his knees and kissed her feet.

"I was astounded by how well she did it," says Pope. "It had a very authentic look, and I was terribly impressed. It's kind of embarrassing for me; she probably thought, What kind of weirdo is this?"

Craft was unfazed by Pope's enthusiasm. Still a working artist today at the age of 79, she says that her many PLAYBOY projects gave her the opportunity to learn about other artists and their techniques. "worked like a school for me," she says. "It was the most effective training I ever got."

Having begun in 1967 with an assignment from founding art director Arthur Paul, Craft continued to work for PLAYBOY through 2000. Across those five decades, her phenomenal gift for working in whatever medium and style the task at hand required — including art deco, biblical, trompe l'oeil, even nursery-rhyme illustration — is on display in more than 100 magazine pieces.

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From the moment she picked up her big sister's crayons and drew a mountain landscape on a sliding screen in her family home in Kanazawa, Japan at the age of two, Craft knew she was an artist. "That was the first huge painting I did," she says. "Nobody scolded me — I'm so grateful!"

Another early moment had an indelible effect on the nascent artist. "My grandmother was carrying me on her back. Outside was the forest, in beautiful sunlight. A stray bamboo leaf, stuck to the end of a cobweb, twirling with the breeze. The sunlight hit the wooden sash, and I thought it was the most beautiful thing," she says. "It is etched in my mind. That was the first full awareness of being surrounded by beauty."

Ever since, Craft has gravitated toward beauty and endeavored to capture it in her work. "Unfortunately, I'm a mere mortal," she says, "and so I can't grab it."

After obtaining a fine art degree in Japan, Craft moved to the States in late 1964 for graduate study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Arriving in the thick of a miserable winter, she almost turned on her heel and fled. "No leaves on the trees, and it was desolate, so lonely looking," she recalls. "And the cold! It was colder than any cold I knew."

But she stuck it out and began her studies in 1965, frequently visiting the eponymous museum next door to wonder at the master works within. After a year and a half, Craft left school and started working within Chicago's studio system, which she describes as "a bunch of illustrators sitting and waiting for salesmen to bring jobs." It wasn't long before her portfolio found its way to Art Paul and she accepted her first PLAYBOY assignment: an illustration for a wry short story about urban bohemians. From there the PLAYBOY commissions kept coming in, engaging her virtuoso artistry for everything from fiction, humor, essays and tech stories to a sex survey.

"With her sophisticated citation of many strands from Western art's tradition of visual fantasy, Craft clearly has high expectations for her audience's wider cultural knowledge," writes professor Lorraine Janzen Kooistra about Craft's PLAYBOY paintings for another ribald classic: Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. Hieronymus Bosch, Botticelli and Arthur Rackham are among the visual references Kooistra notes in the playfully wicked paintings.

Craft's versatility also caught the eye of novelist and cultural critic Ray Bradbury. "Kinuko Craft is an artist for all seasons, for all kinds of subjects, and in all kinds of styles," he writes in his 1985 volume *The Art of Playboy*. "She fits herself to her subject with charming ease and yet leaves herself free to remain herself. Her illustrations suggest one who is a true connoisseur of art, widely ranging through all the countries of the world."

Bradbury goes on, "One cannot help but think how delightful it would be to walk into a gallery full of the fruits of her kaleidoscopic talents." (We're happy to report that one can, simply by flipping through the PLAYBOY archive.) Years later, Craft would illustrate *The Witch Door*, one of Bradbury's original PLAYBOY short stories.

Other notable authors whose stories were paired with Craft's creations include Paul Theroux, John Collier and T.C. Boyle. Alice K. Turner, PLAYBOY's fiction editor from 1980 to 2001, described her as "one of our very best artists."

Writer Gore Vidal was so taken with one of Craft's paintings for his 1978 story *Kalki* that she and the magazine decided to give it to him. But in trying to compliment her work, Vidal unintentionally slighted her. "When he received it, he said, 'I usually don't like illustration, but I like this one.' It's offensive," Craft says, laughing. "I wanted to say, 'What's wrong with illustration?' "

Outside of PLAYBOY, Craft worked for advertising agencies, textbook publishers and other magazines including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, *The Atlantic* and *Forbes*. Rarely given much time to complete her projects and reluctant to turn down work, Craft frequently pulled all-nighters to meet deadlines, drinking a single cup of cold green tea to stay awake.

"YOU CAN FEEL THE PAINTER'S PASSION IMPRISONED IN THE CANVAS."

"Everything that was flying my way, I caught it. It was one of those aggressive periods. I have to do it, I want to do it," she says. "That was the passion I had — even for math-book illustrations."

In the first decades of her career, illustration was a male-dominated field, as Pope recalls. Craft faced additional barriers, especially at smaller agencies and publications. "When they looked at me, all they saw was Asian. 'Bring me the Asian samples from your portfolio next time,' " Craft says potential clients would tell her. "Not being born in this country, and speaking with an accent, was not advantageous."

But Craft recalls PLAYBOY as being fair and welcoming. "They looked at me as a painter, just a painter," she says. "PLAYBOY was gender blind, color blind."

Craft's work has been shown in galleries across the country, and she was inducted into the Society of Illustrators hall of fame in 2008. Her paintings have graced the covers and pages of dozens of books, and her work is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian.

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In the early 1980s Craft left Chicago for the East Coast to settle into more rural environs. "I love trees more than humans, I think," she says. High on a hill in the forests of Connecticut, a black bear visits her big backyard and plays with the birdseed cakes, sometimes bringing its cubs. It's a setting Craft vastly prefers to city life, though living in a rural area has had its complications, she recalls sending canvases on their own to New York via bus.

Though the advent of faxing and later FedEx made it much easier to deliver sketches and final art to clients, not all technological advances have resonated with Craft. Digital art in particular holds no allure. "At a museum, you can feel the painter's passion imprisoned in the canvas," she says. "When it's printed, everything — structure, composition, idea — is there, but not the passion. Digital gives me the same feeling. It's beautiful, but somehow not enough."

The artwork Craft produced for PLAYBOY spanned multiple genres, but today she paints mostly in a style of fantastical realism. Her newer work frequently features strong women characters such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, the 12th century queen.

"I'm becoming a militant for women's rights," Craft says. "Y chromosome is not that great!"

These days she sells her original canvases through the Borsini-Burr Gallery in California. She's hard at work on an oil painting of a "winter general" who marched from the depths of her imagination — a powerful white-haired woman wearing armor and wielding a sword. For such works the initial drawing can take up to a week, followed by session after session of painting with her brushes, which she likens to feeding. "If the painting takes longer, I have to feed her again. It's very hard. I'm 79 years old and work like I'm 49!"

Taxing though it may be, Craft has no plans to stop painting, finding purpose in endlessly chasing a connection to beauty and to nature. "There's something I want to grasp, which always eludes me. I think I'm going to feel that till the end of my life," Craft says. "My poor bones can't rest. I have to do what I'm wired to do." ■

Detail of Craft's illustration for a June 1987 PLAYBOY *fiction piece titled The Egret.* ***Opposite:*** *The triptych Craft created to accompany The Gabriliad, Alexander Pushkin's naughty New Testament spoof that* PLAYBOY *ran as a "ribald classic" in 1974. It was her first time working with gold leaf; she visited the medieval room at Chicago's Art Institute for inspiration.* ***Left:*** *Craft in her studio, circa 1983.*

WE WON'T GO BACK

FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, PLAYBOY HAS CHAMPIONED REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY — IN THESE PAGES, IN THE COURTS AND ON THE STREETS

BY **ELIZABETH YUKO**

"It's okay if you think it's not right for women to have abortions but it's not your problem, because we decide." So said Chelsea Handler in a piece PLAYBOY ran during the whiteknuckle summer of 2016. Entitled *My Choice*, Handler's story includes characteristically blunt reflections on her personal experience with abortion and makes a case for the durability of *Roe v. Wade*. "Once you go forward in history," she wrote, "you don't go backward."

But backward may be exactly the direction reproductive rights in the United States are now headed. With the emergence of at least 14 state-level abortion cases that could, if they find their way to the newly right-leaning Supreme Court, result in the toppling of *Roe v. Wade*, it's time for the pro-choice movement to regroup. Toward that end, we offer this brief history of reproductive rights through the lens of PLAYBOY.

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America in the 1960s was, by and large, not a safe place for a woman to terminate a pregnancy. In most states, abortion was illegal (with exceptions for cases such as fetal anomaly, extreme natal complication and some instances of rape and incest). Those seeking the procedure had to resort to whatever care they could get, which ranged from sympathetic doctors operating illegally to unqualified individuals performing abortions without training, sterile conditions or necessary resources. In 1965, 17 percent of all deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth occurred due to illegal abortions, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Abortion was a public health crisis, and PLAYBOY responded accordingly

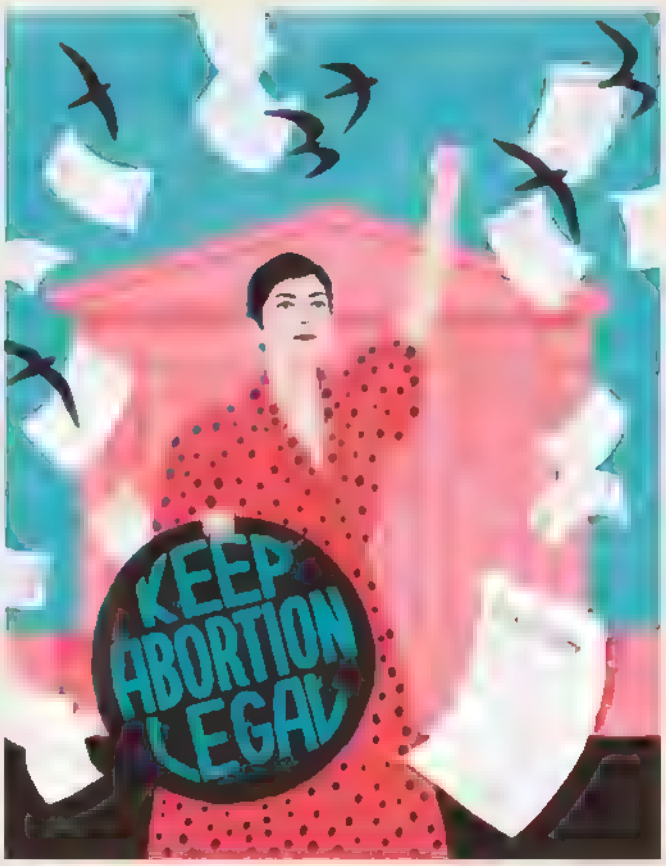
Some of the subject's earliest appearances in the magazine were in Hugh Hefner's *Playboy Philosophy*, peppered throughout his voluminous musings on sex and society In a January 1964 installment Hefner wrote, "Abortion remains illegal in all states of the Union, although it is undergone by hundreds of thousands of women annually, under circumstances that seriously endanger not only their health and welfare, but their very lives." To combat any misconceptions about who was seeking the procedure, he added that more than half of all illegal abortions were performed on married women. Like it or not, he argued, abortion was a mainstay in married, middle-class American families.

PLAYBOYcemented its position in the December 1965 issue, in a response to an anti-choice letter: "A pregnant woman is faced with choices and we think she should be allowed to decide which alternative is preferable under the circumstances whatever the circumstances happen to be." We upped the ante in the May 1967 issue when, speaking in the *Playboy Forum* a deep-diving letters section in which readers and editors debated issues raised in the *Philosophy* our editors urged readers to write to their senators and representatives, demanding they support bills to

"liberalize antiquated abortion statutes" in 12 states. Clearly Hef and his colleagues viewed the issue as one of universal urgency.

Perhaps the most meaningful contributions to the conversation came from women, despite the magazine's overwhelmingly male readership at the time. According to a 2017 article by Sierra Tishgart in The Cut, of the more than 350 letters on abortion published in the magazine between 1963 and 1973, approximately one third were written by women. In a world where decisions about women's bodies were made overwhelmingly by men, women used our letters section as a global platform from which to speak their truths

In addition to our editorial coverage, the Playboy Foundation — the charitable- giving organization that supported groups embodying the Playboy Philosophy — began funding the abortion - rights movement in 1966 by providing a grant to the Association for the Study of Abortion, which offered information and strategy advice for other advocacy groups. This continued with financial support of organizations including the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws and the Women's National Abortion Coalition, as well as those working on a local level in middle-American battlegrounds such as North Dakota, Michigan and Ohio Playboy also provided funding to the American Civil Liberties Union Women's Rights Project, whose co-founder Ruth Bader Ginsburg co-authored a 1973 letter to the magazine that cited "the Playboy Foundation's generous support" while emphasizing the daunting challenges that remained.



As the idealistic 1960s gave way to the shell-shocked 1970s, the pro-choice movement dug in. Instead of pushing for liberalized abortion laws, it began advocating for their all-out repeal. This was initially addressed here in a 1967 *Forum* letter from Dr. Lonny Myers of Illinois Citizens for the Medical Control of Abortion. Myers argued that even in the wake of partial reform, "there will be no significant improvement in all the tragedies associated with clandestine abortions." But perhaps the most wellknown example of PLAYBOY's advocacy for repealing abortion laws came in the form of *The Abortion Revolution*, a September 1970 article by Dr Robert Hall that served as an examination of the history of the procedure and a playbook for how a total repeal could be achieved. His predictions of how the repeal would carry the day in the Supreme Court largely came true.

Which brings us to the case that changed it all

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In July 1970, a 22-year-old Floridian named Shirley Wheeler became the first woman in American history to be convicted of manslaughter for having an abortion. The Playboy Foundation provided grants to the Center for Constitutional Rights to help with Wheeler's defense, as well as to law professor Cyril Means, who filed a brief on her behalf on constitutional issues involved in the case. Ultimately, the Florida Supreme Court overturned her conviction. And an important bond was formed: The foundation later provided Means with the funds to file an amicus curiae brief in support of the Texas court case that eventually led to *Roe v. Wade*

The right to privacy was the basis for this landmark case. The plaintiff, then known only as Jane Roe, was a single woman from Texas who wanted to end her pregnancy in one of the many states that permitted abortion only when the woman's life was in danger. In a 7-2 decision, handed down in January 1973, the Supreme Court ruled that the constutional right to privacy "is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." Most of the existing state laws on abortion were rendered unconstitutional

With that victory, PLAYBOY's abortion coverage ebbed over the next three decades with the notable exception of indepth coverage of antiabortion terrorism in the 1990s But a creeping post-Obama conservatism, plus increasing challenges to abortion on state and federal levels, meant a new wave of engagement. Handler's 2016 piece broke the news that the author had chosen to have not one but two abortions at the age of 16 a revelation that went viral and demonstrated the issue's continuing volatility. Two years later, on the other side of Donald Trump's ascension to the White House, then outgoing president of Planned Parenthood Cecile Richards sat for the *Playboy Interview*. The tenor of that May June 2018 installment echoed that of our coverage from the 1960s and early 1970s Richards stressed the need for everyone, men included, to stay vigilant in the fight for reproductive rights a battle cry that became even more urgent with the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in the fall of last year

"If we believe in progress and in taking away barriers," Richards said, "there's always going to be a next fight." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY **MONICA GARWOOD**

Bria Elisabeth Briggs

Model **@bria.ells**

Photographers **Darwin Ortiz | @darwinworldmedia**

Could you tell us a bit about yourself? Hi, my name is Bria. I grew up in Washington State and moved to San Diego when I was 21. I gained a lot of momentum over the following few years in my personal development & success, and eventually moved to LA to grow more in the entertainment world not even 6 months ago. Piano and sports were a big part of my life growing up and really played a role in shaping who I am today. I always see every day as an opportunity to learn, grow, and spread joy to those around me.

Can you give us a background on your career and where it all started? When I was 13 I realized how much I loved getting dressed up and taking photos of myself. All through high school I would do this. It sounds pretty silly but I loved hearing all the positive feedback I'd get from my peers about everything I was doing. I did my first mini runway show for Mary Kay makeup when I was 18 in my hometown which was a small gig but it made me realize how much I loved collaborating with creators and artists. I didn't actually start doing professional photoshoots and working with photographers until I was about 23. After doing probably a dozen of those shoots, I got an opportunity to travel with Maxim last year and shoot with them. That was my first big experience that accelerated my career.

What's one thing you've learned about yourself? It's not just modeling that I love, it's everything that comes with what I've realized. Meeting awesome new people, getting chances to do podcasts and bikini shows, traveling, etc. It all connects so effortlessly to everything else I love. It also holds me accountable with keeping my diet in check along with staying active.

What is the biggest misconception people have about you? That I have it easy. I've had to work very hard on my inner strength over the years to be able to know what works for me as far as maintaining a balanced life and still being able to stay happy, healthy, and accomplish what I want.

Do you have any hidden talents, if so what is it? Probably telepathy. People tell me all the time that they feel they have a telepathic connection with me and I love it. Feeling connected with this beautiful world and the people in it is what it's all about.

In what ways do you use your platform to inspire or influence others? I just want others to know it's safe to be themselves, and that nothing is impossible. Saying what you feel and being who you are, you can't go wrong. You gotta accept yourself.

What message do you hope to convey through your work? That it's okay to not be just one look or vibe. I'm always on all sorts of wavelengths and wear all different types of clothing /patterns. I can act really princess-like and girly but I can instantly switch into this tomboy more masculine black leather jacket type. Both are 100% me and I love it.

How do you prepare mentally and physically for a big photoshoot or event? I try to fast a bit, but I also make sure to meditate to get prepared and fall asleep to positive affirmations or a nice looped prayer.

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? Watching Netflix and eating pasta probably. I also love walking to Starbucks and just sitting there enjoying some coffee.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? I remember last March I was going to a big party event in LA before I moved there and there were about 5-10 people waiting outside asking me and my other friend (who also modeled for Maxim) for our autographs on our printed Instagram photos. We both looked at each other and you could just feel the excitement we were trying to hide because we didn't expect it.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? If it can't be a person, probably my phone.

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? Nutella + Fritos. I don't think many people know how great that combo is because they've never actually tried it but they should.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words or advice for our readers? Just remember you can do anything you want. You just gotta stay positive and know how powerful you are in creating your own perfect universe.

KITCHEN

Man in His Domain

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ATIBA JEFFERSON

BY YASI SALEK

NEARLY TWO DECADES AFTER LAUNCHING HUF FROM A MODEST STOREFRONT IN SAN FRANCISCO, THE ACCIDENTAL TASTEMAKER IS USHERING HIS EMPIRE INTO A NEW ERA OF SKATING AND STYLE

It wasn't Keith Hufnagel's idea to name his clothing brand after himself. Anne Freeman, his wife at the time, suggested it when they started the company back in 2002, even pushed for it. Hufnagel had been using his nickname, Huf, on his pro-model skateboard decks for some time, and his sponsors put it on T-shirts. He'd built a personal brand around the name already; it was only a matter of transferring it to his new venture. He felt sort of insecure about it, but he did it anyway. Although they later divorced, Freeman remained involved with the company until 2013, and the name she helped mint remains to this day.

"If you look out in the world, there are tons of brands with people's names on them, and you may not even know who they are. Like, do you know who Louis Vuitton is?" Hufnagel asks me.

I do not, in fact, know who Louis Vuitton is or was, despite owning at least one of his purses, so I get Hufnagel's point. You build a brand, time passes, and you as a person become just one helix in its DNA. Or at least that's the goal. I do know who Keith Hufnagel is, however, and so do a lot of other people — mostly skateboarders and skateboarding fans but streetwear devotees too.

When I first interviewed Hufnagel, back in 2005, HUF was a small clothing line with just two stores in San Francisco, some very limited-edition sneaker collaborations and a lot of buzz. Almost 15 years later, we're at HUF headquarters in downtown L.A., talking in his office, which is filled with clothing patterns and art pieces, including a giant pigeon sculpture by artist-skater and HUF collaborator Todd Francis. Hufnagel is wearing black twill HUF work pants, a white HUF-logo pocket T-shirt and Adidas shell toes.

This is where Hufnagel spends most days. On the floor, leaning against the wall is a large poster for the footwear company Lakai featuring a grinning blond boy carrying a tiny skateboard. "Keenan did some modeling," Hufnagel tells me. His six-year-old son with his current wife, Mariellen, was named after Keenan Milton, a professional skateboarder who passed away in 2001. He was Hufnagel's contemporary and best friend. About a year after Milton's death, Hufnagel started HUF. He was 28 at the time.

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Keith Hufnagel was born in New York City in 1974 to a nurse and a computer technician. He grew up in Stuyvesant Town–Peter Cooper Village, an 80-acre post–World War II residential development bound by First Avenue to the west, 23rd Street to the north and 14th Street to the south. "Everyone in the neighborhood was skateboarding," he tells me. "This group of kids used to hang out at Midtown Plaza, and they would skate in those little dead-end streets. We'd all ride, and I learned how to ollie. Then, for my 13th birthday, I got a real professional-style skateboard."

From that day on, Hufnagel never stopped skateboarding. "It was a passion, or it was an addiction, whatever you want to call it," he says. "It was my path." Skateboarding was an entry point into a new community, into new geography. "The whole thing is social, because you're meeting people and staying connected with them and going to skate their areas. I met Chris Keeffe in my area and then went out to Woodside, Queens and skated his area. Then I met Jon Buscemi and Gino Iannucci and went out to Long Island and hung with them. And then there's Mike Hernandez in the Bronx and Ryan Hickey in Brooklyn, and all of a sudden New York is no longer this small little city."

New York in the early 1990s is a time of myth. Hufnagel's scene included skaters who would become big names, such as Iannucci and Hickey, but also Brian Donnelly, the artist now known as KAWS, and filmmaker Harmony Korine, who immortalized the world of Hufnagel's high school years with his screenplay for the 1995 film Kids, which featured other members of the scene: Justin Pierce, Leo Fitzpatrick and, most famously, Chloë Sevigny.

In 1992 Hufnagel packed up and moved to San Francisco, ostensibly to attend college but more to pursue skateboarding. "I saw California as the mecca for skateboarding," he says, "and at that time San Francisco had the biggest scene. It was where all the footage was coming from."

If New York is where Hufnagel found his passion, San Francisco is where he made that passion a profession. He turned pro halfway through his freshman year, joining a company called Fun Skateboards. He was skating all the time and traveling to film in Europe and Japan. Soon he had to make a choice. He chose his passion. He dropped out of school and kept skateboarding.

I ask him what "going pro" entails. "First you have to understand there are no actual rules in skateboarding," he says. "If someone says you're pro, you're pro, which means your name goes on a skateboard and you get paid a royalty. You basically become your own brand." When Fun Skateboards folded in 1994, Hufnagel was picked up by Real. For the next eight years, he built his brand. He moved to L.A., then back to San Francisco, kept traveling the world, kept living his dream.

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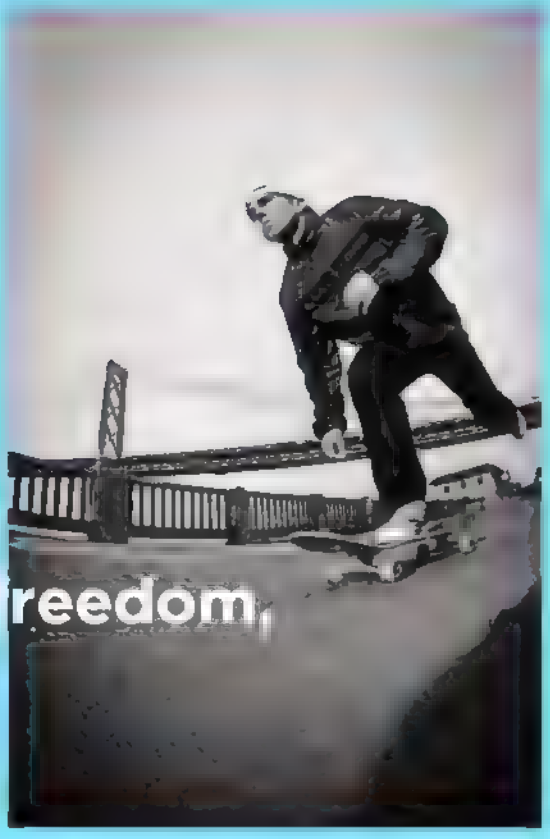
Historically, skateboarding has been a sport fundamentally about pleasure. Skateboarding is about freedom, adrenaline, creativity. Art has always played a crucial role: Most skate decks have boundary-pushing graphics designed by fringe and underground artists. Music too: Ask people from a certain generation how they discovered their favorite bands, and a common answer will be that they found them through skate videos. A lot of skateboarders became artists, musicians or filmmakers. Skateboarding is a social organizer: You skate with your friends and hang out with other skaters. Skateboarding is a party. "You can go to a place, drink beer, skate all night," Hufnagel says. "You can drink and smoke till four or five in the morning, pass out, wake up at four in the afternoon and do the same thing. Something I always thought about is, How am I gonna keep the party going?" It was this question that planted the seed for HUF.

"When you go 10 years deep into skateboarding, you realize at some point that you can't do this forever," Hufnagel says. "I can skateboard forever, but I can't travel the world and be at a professional level forever." He pauses. "I think you just want change too."

And so Hufnagel began to think about change. In his travels he'd been exposed to the street culture in Japan and Europe. Sneaker collecting was becoming a big deal the world over. And Hufnagel was into all of it — the sneakers, the street art and, most of all, the clothing. He wore pieces from Supreme, Japanese brand Mad Hectic and Stüssy, which sponsored him. Off the board he wore limited-edition Nike Air Maxes. "People were just trading and finding out where things were," he says. "This culture was really brewing."

He wouldn't say it himself, but Hufnagel has always been



Skateboarding is about freedom, adrenaline, creativity.

defined by his style. He stood out as a skateboarder because of his powerful, fast and graceful physicality. To a lesser extent, he was known for his aesthetics. "He just dressed kind of fresh," former HUF creative director Hanni El Khatib says. "When people think of him as a skateboarder, they definitely think of his style." Hufnagel was so into clothing that in the late 1990s he did a six-month stint at the Fashion Institute of Technology, taking classes in design and pattern making.

And so HUF was born in a narrow side room in Hufnagel's apartment in San Francisco. At the time, Hufnagel was at the height of his skateboarding career, still riding for Real and landing ollies higher than heaven. He and Freeman opened the first HUF store on Sutter Street as a sort of marketplace for all the things he'd discovered and coveted on his travels. They mainly carried sneakers, and because of Hufnagel's connections they often had the rarest limited-edition Nikes. They also offered clothing from Supreme, P.A.M., Stüssy and Mad Hectic, as well as skate decks and KAWS figurines. And from day one, they made their own T-shirts, with big HUF logos on them.

T-shirts led to an entire line of clothing that was immediately popular with industry tastemakers. But it was their Plantlife socks — athletic socks with an all-over pot-leaf print, designed by El Khatib — that reached a broader audience. They were created half jokingly as a conversation starter to get girls at parties. (Hufnagel doesn't really smoke weed.) But they took off after members of the rap group Odd Future, who frequented the brand's first L.A. store, started wearing them; the socks became one of the best-selling items in HUF history.

Artist collaborations were an early and enduring part of the brand. Barry McGee, Cleon Peterson, Chloé Kovska and other artists have all done their first clothing designs with HUF. I ask Kovska what HUF offered that interested her. "The freedom to breathe," she replies. "They didn't have a problem with risqué imagery, weed or nudity. I could just be myself with them. Nothing was a bad idea."

HUF's aesthetic crystallized early on. Ultimately, it's rooted in the founder himself: his history, his tastes, his reputation — and his undying love of skateboarding. HUF is not a core skate brand, but it's not purely a streetwear brand either. Skateboarding anchors it. Hufnagel wants HUF to have a skate team no matter what. He wants skaters to wear HUF clothes. "Our roots come from skateboarding, so we're always going to support skateboarding, one way or another," he says. "We're going to have a team, we're going to do tours, we're going to put people in the clothes, we're going to embrace who they are and help them excel in skateboarding."

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In the past 17 years, HUF has gone from a company with a few Tshirt designs to a globally recognized streetwear brand. There are 13 HUF stores, and the company's signature wares are carried in 59 countries. After a 2018 womenswear soft launch, there are plans to widely release the line to reflect the significant presence of women in the sport. Although HUF's growth has included several sets of outside investors (it's currently majority owned by Japanese company TSI Holdings, which is also the parent company of Lakai), Hufnagel has stayed on in varying capacities the entire time. His current title is chief creative officer, and he goes to the office every day.

With the sport of skateboarding changing so much in the past two decades, has Hufnagel ever struggled to stay true to his roots? No, he says, because he doesn't think the skateboarding mind-set ever truly changed. "We don't care what people think," he says. "We're gonna do this because we love it. It creates a culture. The kids involved in it are fresh; they're creating new fashion styles. Kids who are skateboarders are walking down runways for Louis Vuitton. That's pretty fucking amazing."

At first I thought Hufnagel's main motivation was to protect his legacy — the Louis Vuitton–ification of his name. But by all accounts, he has little ego. The more I talk to him, the clearer it becomes that what really keeps him showing up day after day is something else entirely. It's to protect, to be the caretaker of the skateboarding ethos. He doesn't view this as an obligation but as a privilege. Skateboarding gave him friends; it gave him a career, the opportunity to travel, a purpose, a name. "Now I'm in the business of apparel and watching skateboarders grow," he says. "I've continued the same path, but I've just changed positions. I never had to leave skateboarding."

At the age of 45, Hufnagel may not be drinking beers till four A.M. or landing huge tricks, but he's definitely still at the party. He still skateboards every day. "I'm not throwing myself down stairs, but I still have fun going out and just basically skating three blocks and getting a coffee," he says. Is it still as much fun as it was when he was a teenager? He nods. "It's freedom. Freedom to roll fast, to get around easy. I mean, you can grab a fucking Bird scooter and do that, but you may not look that cool." ■

CLASSIC CARTOONS

"Damn it! Somebody's at the air lock!"

"I'd like to disassociate myself from the remarks of my companions, Miss."

"Our task, ladies and gentlemen, is to convince the American male that driving a small car is no reflection on the size of his genitalia."

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